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GREEN MOUNTAIN JOE, The Old Trapper of Malbro Pond.

By LIEUT. E. H. KELLOGG,



On reaching the door Joe placed his foot against it, but it was fastened inside. "Hallo, neighbors," said he, in a loud voice, as he shook the door violently. "What do you want?" came the reply from within.

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GREEN MOUNTAIN JOE,

The Old Trapper of Malbro Pond.

By LIEUT. E. H. KELLOGG,

Author of "Billy Button, the Young Clown and Bareback Rider," "The Weird House of 'White Cliff,' etc.

CHAPTER I.

JOE WILLIS AND THE PANTHER.

"YA-R-L, ya-r-l, yeow!"

A shrill, uncanny, almost unearthly cry rang out, sharp and clear, on the brisk morning air.

"Painter, by ginger!" exclaimed an old trapper, who had just arisen from his bed of pine brush on the side of the Green Mountains, Vermont, facing the eastern slope.

"I wonder whar on earth the pesky varmint is? His skin'll come in valurable, and thar's twenty-five dollars bounty on his head."

"Ya-r-l, ya-r-l, yeow!"

And again the shrill, startling notes rang out on the still morning air more piercingly than before.

The hunter grasped his smooth-bore, ramming home a charge of buck and ball, and looking keenly around, saw the vicious brute creeping stealthily out on the branch of a neighboring tree.

He was a magnificent specimen of his kind, and the trapper whispered *sotto voce* as he beheld him:

"Dorg my cats if he ain't a beauty—fully eight feet from his ears to ther tip of his tail, or my eyes are getting blinder'n a mole outen this hill!" and lifting his piece he took deliberate aim between the two glaring eyes that flashed like fire from the panther's tawny features.

"Gol durn yer, ye spiteful cuss, you nearly caught me nappin' this time, and no mistake."

Then pulling trigger, he blazed away.

Flash!

Bang!

"Yarl!"

A piercing yell of pain told that the shot had taken effect, and at the same instant a fierce oath proclaimed that something unexpected had occurred to the hunter.

So there had.

Just as he pressed his left foot forward to take aim it slipped suddenly upon some mossy substance beneath him and precipitated him into the bed of a narrow trout-stream, which, heightened by the recent rains, was dashing and tearing madly down the mountain side at his very feet.

As a matter of course the sudden lurch caused the mouth of the rifle to veer up, as his feet went from beneath him, causing the ball to fly wide of the mark, but two of the buck-shot hit the panther in the ear and forehead, causing the fierce cry of rage and pain that followed the shot.

In an instant, as the reverberation of the rifle came rattling back from the rocky, pine-capped mountain side, the baying of two fox-hounds was heard, as two magnificent specimens of the breed sprang erect from the pine bed upon which the hunter had been sleeping when aroused by the cry of the panther and hastened hither and thither in search of their master.

"Hyer, durn yer, hyer!" shouted he from the spot in the trout-brook, where he had fallen and lodged nearly up to his neck between two rocks which held him fast; "lend a hand or I'll be drowned, strangled, or sucked to death by that blasted painter!"

The appeal seemed to have instantaneous

effect upon the sagacious brutes, for they hastened to the hunter at once, and baying their satisfaction, commenced hauling and pulling at his clothing vigorously with their teeth, and endeavoring to extricate him from his perilous position.

"That's it, good boys!" shouted he, as a final effort produced the desired effect; "and now for another shot at the pesky critter to make up for lost time!"

But saying and doing were two quite different matters, for as he reached the side of the stream, shaking his garments free from the dripping water, and stooped to recover the rifle that had dropped from his grasp while falling, the panther made a lithe spring from the branch of the tree, uttering another howl of rage.

The hunter saw that it would be useless to attempt to load again, for the frantic beast would be upon him long before he could do so; he accordingly drew his bowie-knife, and grasping it firmly in his right hand, set his teeth determinedly, and stooping forward with his left leg advanced, the other bent a little back, with muscles tense as iron, his left arm thrown across his chest to protect it from the sharp teeth and claws, he steadily awaited the attack of the ferocious assailant.

Meanwhile, as the panther struck the earth at a slight distance from the hunter, one of the dogs gave vent to a savage bay, and sprang directly at him, making a snap for the shoulder, but with a quick stroke of the left paw the panther set the needle-like claws deep in the dog's nose, drawing a spurt of red blood as the dog retreated with a yell of pain.

The other leaped to his companion's support almost as quickly, but meeting the attack in much the same manner; the panther also caused him to retreat *hors-du-combat*, and then crouching rampant, with his eyes ablaze and his tail lashing the air, he bounded forward with a lithe spring.

But the momentary respite had afforded the hunter full chance to prepare himself for the attack, and as the panther came whirling through the air with a hissing sound, he darted nimbly aside and delivered a quick stroke at the flying monster with his knife.

The blow told home with telling effect, slicing a deep gash in the bristling side, and again as the blood spurted from the wound the maddened beast uttered a yell of pain.

But it had scarcely struck the ground a second time before it wheeled round and sprang frantically at the hunter, who had turned as quickly to face it.

Again the swishing knife cleft the air cutting a nasty gash in the animal's throat, drawing another spurt of blood; but as if regardless of its pain, the now thoroughly infuriated animal retaliated with a savage stroke of its huge paw, which literally tore the buckskin hunting shirt from the hunter's breast, laying it bare, with the tracks of the cruel claws deeply imbedded therein in gore.

And then, before the wounded man had time to recover from the terrible effect of the blow, the panther buried its fangs deeply in its throat, and began sapping his life's blood as it tore violently away right and left at the unprotected limbs with both its fore and hind claws.

It was indeed a desperate and thrilling situation.

The trapper was long past the age of forty, if he had not entered the fifties; and as he battled vigorously away for dear life, he felt that his strength was deserting him rapidly with every minute's duration of the conflict.

But he fought bravely on with desperate determination to win the battle or die like a man, calling stoutly the while to the dogs to come to his aid.

"Come, ye infernal, sneaking skulks," roared he till he was black in the face, "don't stand there yelpin' and yawpin', but take a hand in, or if I ever get outen this tussel alive I'll make it so hot that you can't stand a hair of your hides, I will, by Ginger!"

And meantime the old man kept on hacking and cutting, slashing and stabbing at the panther, who was hugging and clawing the life out of him, until the coveted pelt was one mass of cuts and stabs that threatened utter ruin to his intrinsic value.

As if perfectly comprehending the import of their master's threat both hounds instantly responded to the call, and with fierce bays came bounding to his assistance, attacking the panther in the rear.

This reinforcement completely changed the aspect of affairs, for experiencing the combined attack the panther was obliged to turn his attention in that direction, thus affording the hunter a better chance to defend himself.

Taking advantage of the situation the old man cut and slashed away more vigorously than ever; whereas, before he had simply been able, owing to the tenacious grip, to plunge his knife here and there on the panther's back, where chance afforded he could now make the breast, as the animal was obliged to withdraw his hold to protect himself.

Thus, as the head reared back and the claws partially released themselves, he darted a swift stroke at the white, upturned breast, and as the blade told home up to the very hilt he could feel the life blood gushing in hot torrents over his hand as the talons parted with a spasmodic jerk and the panther dropped to the earth, tearing it wildly up in its dying throes.

CHAPTER II.

GREEN MOUNTAIN JOE'S DISCOVERY.

"By Ginger, that was a mighty tough tussle," said the trapper, as the panther gave its last kick and lay dead before him; "it e'en most tuckered me out! Blame my skin, ef I ever had such a rough tug of it afore!"

Then turning, he knelt down by the dead panther and commenced measuring it from head to foot.

"Just as I calculated," said he, rising and reloading his rifle with a charge of shot, "exactly eight foot, and not a hair to spare."

"Come hyer!"

The last words to his dogs, which were sneaking away into the bushes, and raising his piece, he poured the contents into the sides of the shivering animals.

A low whine was the simple response, as the hounds returned and crouched trembling at his feet, licking his moccasins and manifesting the most abject terror.

"I'll teach ye, yer miserable skunks, ter

leave yer old master in the lurch when he needs yer the most; what do yer mean?"

The hounds crawled and fawned at his feet, whining most piteously.

"Thar, that'll do," said the trapper, kicking them as they slunk away again, and lay down at a slight distance, "that'll do, but see that yer don't attempt it again, or I'll slice yer ears close ter yer skulls, 'deed I will!"

And kneeling down, he fell to skinning the dead panther as though nothing unusual had occurred.

When he had completed the operation, which took him barely ten minutes, for he was an adept at the business, he spread the pelt skin out upon an adjacent rock, and turned toward the fire which was smoldering near his last night's couch.

"I calculate I'll have somethin' ter eat now," said he, "for I'm 'mazin' hungry after this mornin's bout. It's a mighty appetizer, is a brisk wrestle with a painter afore breakfast. Hallo, just the thing!"

And turning, he took a fat jack-rabbit from a trap that he had set the previous night.

Skinning this also, he tossed the skin upon that of the panther, and spitting the carcass upon a long hickory stick, planted the latter in the earth over the hot bed of coals.

"Now, then," continued he, turning away, "ter see what it was that caused me ter slip inter ther brook; blame the cussed luck!"

And moving on, he proceeded in the direction of the rushing stream.

Kneeling down by the edge, he inspected the bank with the utmost care.

"This is ther spot," said he, pulling up a bed of moss, "but blame my skin, what's this? Silver!"

His eyes grew as big as half dollars at the discovery he had made.

Before him, where he knelt, directly beneath the bed of moss, which had given way beneath his feet when he fired at the panther, and precipitated him into the trout brook, was plainly discernible a white metallic substance that shone like silver in the light of the rising sun that was just gilding the mountain side.

"By Ginger!" gasped the trapper, rubbing his eyes in the intensity of his amazement, "am I dreaming, or have I waked up at all?"

"Ho! there! Ho! Joe Willis; I say. Ho there!"

The old trapper jumped up as if he had been shot.

"That's me," whispered he, as if somewhat alarmed at the cry, "that's me—who's that calling Joe Willis so early in the mornin'—hey?"

And before he shouted the reply the old man had covered up the discovered ore with such rare skill that it would have taken an experienced prospector to have discovered the spot at all.

"Is that you, Joe?"

The voice came from a little way down the mountain side.

"Yes!"

A few moments passed, and then a youthful figure was seen clambering leisurely up the rugged cattle path toward the spot where the old trapper was standing near the fire, to which he had returned, after making the singular discovery.

The new-comer was a stout, well-built, manly-looking boy of some seventeen or eighteen years of age. He was dressed in a rough hunting-suit of buckskin, something similar to that of the old trapper, with untanned moccasins to match; and over his shoulders hung a long smooth-bore rifle, with hunting-pouch and other implements of similar character.

"I thought I'd find you hereabouts, Joe," said he, with a pleasant smile, "and I wanted to have a day's hunting with you."

"What made you think so, Sammy?" asked the trapper carelessly, as he shook the extended hand rather coldly.

"Well, I knowed you hung about here, somewhere," said the boy, "and if I hadn't found you here, I was pretty sure of finding you up to Malbro Pond, I calculate."

"Well, yer mought, and then again yer moughtn't."

"Wall, I mightn't, and then again I might, and depending on the latter I started bright and early to look you up."

"Had breakfast yet, Sammy?" asked the trapper, turning over the rabbit, which was pretty well done on one side by this time.

"No; and I'm pesky hungry after my tramp, though," replied the lad, sitting himself down beside the trapper's couch, "but mother put me up a big lunch last night, so I'm pretty well off for rations. I've got lots of apple pie and ginger bread in my pouch, so I'll have a good square meal, bet yer life."

Joe Willis uttered a sniff of disgust.

"Only fit for babbies," said he, sharply. "Ef yer want ter go huntin' with me, ye'll have to live on solid fodder and no soft stuff; so yer kin put that in yer pipe and smoke it, waghl!"

"Oh, if that's yer gait, old man," retorted the boy, laughing cheerfully at the trapper's wry face, "I'm in with yer—see there!"

And pointing to an opening in the pine brush at a slight distance, he brought his rifle to bear upon it.

"I see a prime fat rabbit goin' in there just now," continued he, "and I bet I fetch him first pop. There he is now, and here goes!"

Flash!

Crack!

The bullet flew straight to the mark, and darting into the bush, the boy presently reappeared with a bleeding rabbit dangling by the ears, which was giving his last kick.

"How's that?" asked he.

"That was a bully shot, Sammy," said the trapper, admiringly. "You'll make a hunter yet if you keep on."

"Bet I will!" replied Sam. "I fetched down a pretty big stake t'other night down to the shanty, and both mother and dad are prouder of me than prize turkeys—bet yer boots they are."

"What was it?" asked Joe.

"I'll tell you all about it," said the boy, as he commenced dressing his rabbit and placed it over the fire in a similar manner to that of the hunter.

"It was only night before last that father went down to Brattleboro' to stop over night, and after I'd got everything snugged up for the night, I went to sleep as usual. It was quite cold, for we had a right smart frost, if you remember."

"Yes."

"Well, I don't know how long I'd been asleep," continued the boy, "when I was awakened by the durndest noise you ever heard out in the chickenry, and as soon as I was fully awake I started for the door to see what caused the ruction. I hadn't got half the way when I heard the horses kicking desperately in the stable, and the cows in the barn-yard bellowin' like mad."

"It can't be a fox," said I to myself. 'Maybe it's a wolf; so I guess I'd better take Betsy along by way of protection.'

"So seizing down the gal from the crotch over the chimney, I made for the door again. Just then I heard a ripping, grunting and snorting outside a little window where mother throws the slops and such like into the swill barrel for the pigs, and before I could make out what was the matter the window busted in with a crash, and by the light of the moon which poured into the kitchen I seen the snoot and face of a big black bear poking through the opening."

"You bet I was taken considerable short. I could scarcely credit my own eyes, but there was Mr. Bear all the same, snorting right smart, and trying to poke his ugly carcass through the opening."

"Well, I didn't stop ter consider long about it, but fotchin' Betsy up right sharp, I blazed away."

"Mother sprang up roaring as if she had been shot herself, demanding what was the matter, and the bear just hopped and jumped fit to kill. He upset the swill barrel in his tantrums, and loading up again, I gave him another shot that settled his hash for good."

"Bully for you," roared Joe, as his eyes danced with delight.

"Well, I went right then and there and skinned him; mother helped me and we toted him or rather hauled him into the barn, and what do you think the onery cuss weighed?"

"I'm sure I can't guess."

"Two hundred and fifty to a dot!"

"Plenty of prime bar meat for a long time, Sammy!" suggested Joe.

"Yes, not speaking of the twenty dollars bounty on his head, not a bad night's work for a mere whipper-snapper, as you often term me—hey, Joe?"

"You'll do, and after that I shan't object to your takin' yer days huntin' as you projected, Sammy. Any of the stock hurt?"

"Nary a one; all safe as a ferret."

"That's good; but see, I've 'arn't twenty-five this mornin' too, Sammy, although it nigh onter cost me my life."

And Joe pointed to the dead panther as he spoke.

CHAPTER III.

GREEN MOUNTAIN JOE TACKLES BLACKSNAKE GIL.

"By jumpers, Joe! he's a buster and no mistake," said the boy, fairly dancing with delight while examining the panther. "Tell me all about it, that's a good fellow; wouldn't I been crazy to been here, I guess not!"

"I guess you would, Sammy," replied the trapper, smiling grimly; "it nearly drove me mad myself."

And while they sat down to breakfast, the old trapper told young Sam Willis all about his morning's adventure, but taking good care to avoid all mention of the discovery of the silver.

During the repast, notwithstanding his asserted repugnance to "soft stuff," as he termed it, Green Mountain Joe did rare justice to Mrs. Willis' excellent apple pie and gingerbread, and when the meal was ended, but little of the luncheon remained, and then Joe whistled to his dogs, remarking that the first thing in order was to look up his traps, so away they went.

Tramping up the mountain-side, they came to the second trap; that is, counting the one from which Joe had taken the jack-rabbit after his encounter with the panther.

"This is the fust one, although it comes second," said Joe, grimly, as he knelt down by the trap to examine it. "The one down yonder was the last one I sot last night when I turned inter camp; why, dang my skin, if it hain't been sprung and sot again!"

"How do you know that?" asked Sam, kneeling down to investigate for himself. "I can't see anything to indicate it."

"But I kin, Sammy," said the hunter, with a wicked look in his eyes; "yer uncle's sight is better'n your'n, notwithstandin' the discrepancy in years; it's been sot again, and Injuns did it, too!"

"You don't say?"

"I just do, and I bet I know who did it, too; blame his ugly whisky-soaked copper-skin, I bet I'll fix him off for it, or my name ain't Joe Willis."

"Who was it?"

"Blacksnake Gil."

"What makes you think it was him, pop?"

"Why, yer know, he's a half-breed, don't yer, and his hair is crinkly as a nigger's, although not so crisp?"

"Yes."

"Well, look hyer."

Green Mountain Joe held up a long black hair that was wavy and kinky.

"What do yer think of that, hey?"

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Sam.

"Lots; it gives the blacksnake away te-toto. There ain't a bit of hair in the mountains like it, 'cept that on the copper devil's head, and I know it. I've suspected the ornery cuss afore, but I never could fotch it home ter him till now. But ef I don't make him eat crow, I'll eat one myself, that's all. Come along, let's go look him up."

He arose to his feet, biting his lips till the blood started and his eyes were black as night.

"He's got one of my rabbit skins, and I mean ter have it outer his black hide afore another hour is over my head."

"Why, it ain't wuth sixpence," replied the boy. "What's the use making a fuss about it, pcp?"

"I don't care if it isn't wuth a brass fardin', Sammy," retorted Joe; "that don't make a differ bitterance; it's ther all-fired meanness of ther thing I'm lookin' at; that's all."

"How do you know that you can find him?"

"Leave that ter me, Sammy," replied Joe—"leave that ter me, and see if I don't find him just as I perdicted."

"But how do you know it was a rabbit?" asked Sam, persistently.

"As easy as wink," answered Joe. "Some of the fur is stickin' fresh in the snare yet, see, and just beside it I found the varmint's har."

Sam looked down at the snare to which the trapper was pointing and saw that it was just as he said, and then he started to follow Joe who was stalking rapidly away.

Joe walked swiftly down a cow path for nearly a quarter of a mile, and then turning off into the brush made straight on until they both came out into an open clearing where quite a number of squares of cord wood were piled up in various directions.

"The cusses are close around here some-ares," whispered Joe, warning Sam to tread as cautiously as possible, "I can smell 'em. Thar!"

He pointed as he spoke to a spur of pale blue smoke which was curling sluggishly up above one of the piles of logs.

"Didn't I tell you so."

"Yes."

"Well come on."

Leading the way Joe made directly for the spot, closely followed by Sam, and as they turned the corner of the pile a group of three Indians were revealed.

But they were not dressed in Indian costume; on the contrary, they were dressed in hunting suits similar to those of Joe and his companion.

They were a dirty, slovenly lot, and their features were of the most villainous description. Two of them were lying on the ground beside the fire, which was nearly out; the third, who appeared the most respectable of the group, if such a term could apply to either, was leaning lazily against an adjoining sapling.

"Say, you fellers," said Joe, as he came within speaking distance, "I want a word with you."

The whole party turned at the sound, and the two who were seated leaped hastily to their feet, lying their hands behind them to grasp their hunting knives.

"Hyer, none of that now," said Joe, sharply but calmly, as he tossed his rifle and knife upon the green moss at his feet; "none of that; I am unarmed as you can plainly see, and have simply come to ask a square question."

"But your companion?" asked the Indian leaning against the tree, with equal gravity.

"Oh, he's only a boy," said Joe, and turning to Sam he told him to throw down his weapons also.

Sam complied, but it was plain from the look on his face that he considered it an extremely hazardous proceeding.

"Well?" inquired the Indian, who was evidently the leader.

"I ain't got nothin' again you, Mal-a-ka," replied Joe; "for I believe yer honest, although yer are in plaguy bad company just now. It's Blacksnake Gil I want. What yer done with that rabbit yer snaked from my snare up ther mountain this mornin'?"

The taller of the two Indians, who had been lying on the ground when Sam and Joe appeared, turned an olive hue, and as his eyes dropped before the piercing gaze of the old trapper, commenced backing out toward the verge of the clearing.

"Come, none of that!" shouted Joe, advancing toward him; "you can't play no such dodge on me. I'm up ter it. I want that rabbit or ther skin, and I don't car' which, so no shennanagin about it!"

"Hold," said the Indian whom Joe had addressed as Mal-a-ka, "we are peaceable, and want no quarrel—if San-ta-na has taken anything of yours, he will return it. I will question him."

Joe paused, while the chief went up to his comrade, and conversed aside in low tones. Presently he returned to Joe's side.

"He says that he has taken no rabbit," said he calmly, "and knows nothing about it!"

"He lies," retorted Joe; "look at his face; he has got it in his hunting-pouch at this very instant!"

And again he started toward the Indian.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHOT FOR LIFE.

THE Indian stood his ground doggedly, but it was evident that he was considerably discomfited.

"Come now, give it up like a good man," said Joe, approaching him, "and I'll let yer off."

"The white hunter lies!" said the Indian, slowly.

"You lie yerself, ye black skunk!" retorted Joe, springing forward and dealing him a stinging blow in the face.

The Indian staggered back, with the blood spurting from his nostrils, and at the same moment Joe darted his hand into the pouch

behind him, and drew forth a still reeking rabbit-skin.

"I told yer so," shouted Joe, dangling the skin in the air.

But the Indian made no attempt to resent the indignity.

"Yer a cowardly whelp, and afraid ter take it up," sneered Joe. "I kin lick yer with one hand in less than a minute, old as I am."

The other Indians said nothing, but did not attempt to assist their comrade.

"Come, that's all I want," said Joe, consigning the skin to his own pouch. "I've proved my words; ef he wasn't guilty, he'd take it up like a man, but he darn't. Now let's all take a drink and call it squarl!"

Producing a hunting flask, Joe handed it to the chief, who took a stiff dram and passed it to his comrade, but when it came to San-ta-na's turn, he stubbornly refused to drink; and returning to his weapons, Joe recovered them, as did Sam, and they both walked leisurely away.

The two friends had retraced nearly half their way to the traps, when Joe paused suddenly, and holding up his hand with a warning gesture, seemed listening attentively.

"Do you hear nothing, Sammy?" he inquired.

"No."

"You must be deaf as an adder," said Joe. "That black skunk's follerin' our trail, and means blood. He's madder'n a hornet in fly time, and would raise my back ha'r quicker'n he'd eat. I could see it in his eyes when we started. Didn't yer notice he wouldn't drink?"

"Yes."

"Wall, that meant mischief. When a red-skin refuses a treat of whisky, look out for squalls. Can't ye hear nothin'?"

"No."

"Wall, I kin—I kin hear the pat, pat, patter of his feet as he's comin' on as plain as I kin hear the beatin' of my heart, and we must look out for him or he'll settle our hash."

"What're you going to do about it, pop?" asked Sam, who was becoming alarmed.

"Don't get scared, Sammy," said Joe, calmly. "I'll give the skunk a lesson that he won't forget in a hurry, and which'll teach him not to follow his betters in such a hurry in ther future."

Going to the side of the road, Joe commenced taking off his hunting-jacket and fox-skin cap, bidding Sam do likewise.

When they had done this, Joe drove two forked sticks, that he cut from the bushes, behind a log, and placing the jackets and caps upon them, gave them the precise appearance of two persons seated quietly together, with their backs toward the path.

"That'll settle his mutton," said Joe, chuckling gleefully at his contrivance; "now come along, Sammy, and I'll show you some of the tallest fun you ever did see."

And stepping cautiously into the bushes just behind the lay figures, the two friends hid themselves securely from view, having first taken care to conceal their footprints by covering them carefully with leaves.

"What are you going to do, pop?" asked the boy, anxiously.

"Don't move nor stir, and don't speak, or you'll give ther whole thing away," whispered Joe, placing his hands across the boy's lips, "but jest keep close watch and ye'll find it all out in good time."

And then for ten minutes neither party spoke a word as they crouched in their places of concealment, eagerly watching the dummies behind the log.

At the end of that interval Sam felt Joe's hand pressing his arm, and, turning, saw his finger pointing toward a clump of cedars on the opposite side of the path.

"Look thar," whispered Joe, "and see what yer'kin see."

Sam looked in the indicated direction, and presently he saw a long, black object poking its way through the bushes.

It was the barrel of a rifle, and the muzzle was pointed directly at the two dummies.

The boy held his breath, and his heart almost ceased its beatings.

For an instant or more the barrel moved unsteadily to and fro, and then a flash of fire followed, as the sharp report of a rifle rang out, sharp and clear, from the bushes.

Sam saw the hunter's hat jog a little, and then all was still.

"I thought I heard two shots, Joe," whispered Sam, as he turned ghastly pale.

"So you did."

Sam turned, and saw that Joe was just drawing in his own rifle.

It was smoking at the muzzle.

The boy's face presented a picture of amazement and inquiry combined.

"Great powers!" whispered he, as the cold chills ran up and down his back, "what have you done?"

"Just what the skunk meant ter do for me," replied the trapper, nonchalantly. "He's dead as a stone and I'm livelier'n a cricket. Come and see!"

And loading as he went, Joe leaped across the road, followed closely by Sam Willis.

On reaching the clump of cedars Joe hastily drew aside the bushes, pointing to a prostrate figure on the ground.

It was all that remained of Blacksnake Gil.

The form lay with the head toward the road, and as the trapper hauled it from the bushes and turned it over, the cold, glassy eyes looked stonily up toward the sky.

The blood was sluggishly oozing from a gaping bullet wound in the forehead, and four buckshot had pierced it in close proximity.

"Come away," groaned the startled boy, "I'm deathly sick."

"Look hyer, now," hissed the trapper, glaring savagely into Sam's eyes, "don't let either speak a word of this to mortal man. The cussed sneak richly deserved what he got—he'd killed us both if I hadn't circumnavigated him in time, for that bullet through my cap would have fothered me dead sure, and he'd been down on you quicker'n chain lightning if I hadn't wiped him out in turn."

"But what yer going to do with the body?" asked Sam.

"Leave the carr'on where it is," said Joe, spurning it with his foot, as he turned away to resume his clothing. "he come alone ter do this, but when his pals miss him, they'll know what's up, and get him out of the way, never fear. I've done my part, and let them attend to thar's."

Sam shuddered at the old man's imperturbability, as he put on his own clothes, and with one last look at the dead Indian, followed Joe quickly up the cow path.

They had not proceeded more than eighty paces before both heard savage shouts to the rear.

"They've found him," said Joe, with a grim smile. "I told you they would and that settles it. Hello!"

As he uttered the exclamation, Joe paused suddenly, and placed his hand to his ear.

"Blame my skin," said he, briskly, "if the skunks ain't on our trail again. They mean fight, and we must meet them like men. Are you afeard?"

"Nary a time," replied Sam. "I'll stand to you like a brick."

"That's the talk," said Joe, slapping him stoutly on the back. "Spoken like a little man, for if we don't show fight now our lives ain't worth a moment's notice."

The next instant both heard the sounds of rapidly approaching footsteps pattering up the mountain path.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WITH THE PEDDLER'S PACK.

"I TOLD you that was them," said Green Mountain Joe, as he looked carefully to the priming of his rifle.

"I don't believe it is," replied Sam Willis, paying the same attention to his piece.

"Why not?"

"Because it's the sounds of jack-boots that I hear," answered Sam, "and the chaps we see down in the clearing had on moccasins."

"By Ethen Allen and ther Continental Congress, I believ' yer right, Sammy. It seems amazin' like it, and no mistake; but we'll find out blame suddent!"

The next instant he sprang nimbly into the cedar bushes, bordering the cow-path, followed closely by his companion.

They had scarcely concealed themselves, when three men dressed in red shirts and slouched hats with their pants tucked into the tops of long cowskin boots, came tearing hastily up the narrow path they had just quited.

One of them, the one in advance, had a heavy pack, resembling those worn by peddlers attached to his shoulders, and was panting and blowing lustily as the perspiration poured in streams down his forehead and cheeks.

"The red scamps 'll snap us up," groaned he, "for I can't go another step. I'm clean tuckered out!"

"Try it, pal," said the man just behind him, "we ain't only a little funder ter go, and we'll all be safe."

"I tell yer I can't," replied the other, doggedly.

"Well, give me ther pack, then!" roared his companion, tossing his rifle to the earth, "an' do yer level best when it comes ter ther pinch!"

"I can't shute nothin'," replied he of the pack, throwing it on the ground.

"Well, then, get shot yerself, blame yer," retorted the other, picking up the bundle and slinging it over his shoulders by the straps.

"Ugh!" grunted the first speaker, picking up the rifle and turning white as a sheet.

"Thar's ther bullets an' other fixins'," said his pal; "and see that yer don't make a mull of it, or I'll slice yer throat for yer pains; see if I don't."

Meanwhile, the third man, who appeared much the cooler of the three, had turned, rifle in hand, looking anxiously down the cow-path.

By this time the patter, patter of moccasined feet was plainly to be heard, and the next moment ten Indians dressed as trappers appeared, turning the edge of a clump of trees some forty or fifty feet down the hill.

"Halt where ye are!" shouted the man with the rifle, bringing it to bear upon them; "halt, or I'll put daylight through ther fust one that moves a step!"

The Indians came to a standstill at once and held a whispered consultation.

Meanwhile, the man bearing the pack had hurried on up the cow-path and disappeared.

"We ain't looking after you," said one of the Indians, acting as spokesman; "we have no trouble with you; let us pass in peace."

"I'll see ye hanged fust," retorted the man. "Stop where ye are until I'm gone ten minutes, and then I don't care a durn what ye do."

"Good."

"Throw down yer arms."

The Indians complied sullenly.

And then warning his companion to watch them sharply, the men retired backward up the cow-path, until they also disappeared from view.

The ten minutes passed in perfect quiet, and then the Indians, who had evidently computed the time by counting, picked up their weapons and started briskly in pursuit.

Three minutes more elapsed, and then Joe and Sam crawled cautiously from the bushes.

"That was a mighty narrow escape," said Sam, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"Maybe," responded Joe, who seemed thinking of something else.

"I wonder where those other chaps came from," said Sam, scratching his head. "They look like a hard crowd, and I never saw them in this region before."

"Nor me nuther," replied the old hunter; "but I've got a bone ter pick with 'em all the same, and I'm going ter hunt 'em up."

"Why, do you know 'em?"

"I should smile," replied Joe, with his face turning as black as night.

"But how are ye goin' ter find 'em?"

"Come and see," answered Joe, stepping into the path, and stooping down, he went slowly up the mountain, regarding every inch of the way with the keenest scrutiny.

"Hyer we are," said he, at length, as he arose from his stooping posture, "and I'm pesky glad of it, for my back's near broken from this investergation."

"Here we are where?" asked Sam, looking curiously around to discover what the old trapper meant.

"That's ther trail," said Green Mountain Joe, pointing to a spot in the rocky path.

"The Indians?" asked Sam, examining in turn.

He saw that a portion of the crumbling rock had given way, as if some party had trod upon it, and looked up inquiringly into Joe's face.

"No," replied the hunter. "Can't ye see for yerself?"

"No."

"Why, blame yer inderlent peepers!" snorted Joe, "it's as plain as the nose on yer face. Look again."

Sam did so.

Joe stooped down and pointed to the abrasion.

"That's the toe and heel of the fellow carrying the pack," said he. "He slipped thar."

And then he covered up the track with some of the broken stone.

"Ye see," continued he, calmly, gnawing off a huge chew of nigger-head tobacco, "that chap ain't used to carryin' sich a blasted load as that 'ar pack, and he came nigh tumblin' down hyer owin' ter his clumsiness. And look hyer, too! These are ther tracks of his pals. That's ther one of ther white-livered cur that funk'd so over that gun. I wish ther pesky skunk'd blow his bloody brains out 'ith it—I do, by ginger!"

"Ye seem ter have it in for him putty heavy, old man," replied Sam.

"Bet yer dear life, Sammy," answered Joe; "and so 'ud you, too, if ye'd had all the dealin's I have with this pesky brute. He's just pisen, he is, and no mistake."

Sam made no reply, as the old hunter rose again.

"But I can't stop ter tell yer no more about it now, Sammy," continued he, "for we must track these scamps ter their lair afore the red-skins find that they've missed our trail and come back hot-footed in search of us, for they'll do it, sure as fate."

Stooping down, he scattered the shattered stones in various directions, and then arose again.

"That'll put 'em all askew," said he, smiling grimly. "They may strike a few of our tracks, but they'll never find whar we left the road. Thar they come now! Dig inter ther bushes and hide for dear life. I'd like ter give ther cusses a passin' shot, but it won't do now—it won't do now."

And darting into the brush, the two friends hid themselves securely.

The next instant the Indians came back down the path, examining every portion with the utmost scrutiny, but utterly failing to discover the hiding-place of the fugitives.

CHAPTER VI.

GREEN MOUNTAIN JOE'S JEOPARDY.

As soon as the Indians had passed the spot where Joe and his boy companion were hidden, the old man crept from the bush again.

"That's all right so fur," said he; "now come along again, and see what we can find."

Proceeding cautiously onward he continued his examination of the rocky ground beneath him.

"Hyer ye are again," said he, pointing to a portion of the rock where a heap of sand had gathered. "Ye can see that, can't yer?"

"Yes," replied Sam, "that's a boot track, sure enough."

"I told yer so, that's ther way I meant ter track 'em."

"You're always right, old man."

"It's a cold day when I'm left."

Then they went on again.

In this manner they proceeded for half a mile or more.

Here the mountains assumed a rougher and more rugged aspect.

The towering pines reared up with their spreading branches swaying in the wind, presenting a rudely romantic picture that charmed and inspired the heart of the young hunter.

"This would be a fine spot for bars," said he, looking keenly around.

"Yer bet," retorted Joe, "but we're lookin' arter wuss game than that, yonder!"

Sam turned and regarded him inquiringly.

"What d'ye mean?" asked he.

"Smugglers!" said Joe, curtly.

Sam whistled.

"Do tell?"

"That's just ther ticket."

"Were them smugglers that we see just now?"

"Certain, but come along and don't ax too many questions."

Sam followed without further inquiry.

Presently they came out into a small clearing among the pines.

In the center stood a low log cabin of rude construction.

"That's ther spot," whispered Joe, pointing toward it, "but I never see it occupied afore."

"I never see it afore," replied Sam. "I never was so far up in the mountains afore."

"It ain't a nice place ter be inter alone," said Joe, "for thar's b'ars, cataments, painters, and wolves hyer, not ter speak of snakes in plenty."

Just then a low hiss struck their ears, and

turning toward the sound Sam saw a large rattlesnake coiled up to spring.

Darting aside he drew up his rifle to fire.

"Stop!" hissed Joe, as the reptile made the spring. "I don't want ter let the skunks know I'm hyer until I surprise 'em."

In an instant he drew up his rifle, and brought the barrel down with a thud upon the serpent's head.

The skull crunched beneath the blow, but the venomous thing writhed and squirmed desperately as it darted forth its poisonous tongue in the most vindictive manner.

But another blow broke the backbone, and the snake lay writhing in the agonies of death.

"That would have been a bad dose for you, Sammy!" said Joe.

Sam laughed.

"I ain't afeard, pop," replied he, as he drew his hunting-knife and whipped off the rattles, consigning them to his hunting-pouch. "That's a prize; fourteen rattlers ain't found every day."

"That's so, but don't stop; come along."

Sam obeyed, following Joe toward the cabin.

On reaching the door Joe placed his foot against it, but it was fastened inside.

"Hallo, neighbors," said he, in a loud voice, as he shook the door violently.

"What do you want?" came the reply from within.

The voice was that of the man who had been carrying the pack.

"I want to see Nat Gleason," replied Joe, sharply.

A whispered conversation was heard inside, and then some one came to the door, and drawing back a bar opened it slightly, looking out through the crack.

Joe motioned Sam to follow, and placing his burly shoulder against the door, pushed it in with a bang.

The man who held it staggered back, and fell prostrate to the floor as the two hunters strode quickly into the cabin.

They found themselves in a low-ceilinged apartment, with rafters overhead, and a fire-place at one end.

There was no furniture in the room with the exception of a deal table and three rustic stools of home-made manufacture, but spread upon the floor in one corner was a bed of leaves covered with a pile of gray blankets.

In the center of the room, in front of the fire-place, in which a pine knot fire was blazing up beneath a steaming pot suspended from the crane, lay the peddler's pack, which had evidently been recently opened.

A number of dress goods patterns of various descriptions were spread around, together with silks, ribbons, handkerchiefs, scarfs, hosiery, gloves, toilet articles, jewelry, etc., that would strike the female eye; while numerous knives, pistols, fancy pipes, watches, chain-guards, seals, playing cards and other articles were also there to attract the attention of the sterner sex.

But Green Mountain Joe paid little heed to the rich supply of goods as he strode sternly to the center of the room.

"Whar's Nat Gleason, Saul Slingsby?" said he, gruffly, seizing up the man who was rising from the floor where he had been hurled by the sudden opening of the door. "Speak quick, or I'll choke the liver outer ye!"

Then transferring both hands to the neck of the trembling wretch, he looked sharply around the room as he tightened his grasp on his throat.

"I-d-o-n't-know!" gasped the half-strangled man.

"That lie sticks in yer throat, ye blamed hypocritical skunk!" roared the irate trapper; "and I've a pesky good mind ter make it ther last one ye ever breathe!"

"Oh, d-o-n't—for the the love of H-e-a-v-e-n—I'll tell yer all!"

Joe had let up a bit as the last words parted the trembling lips, and at the same instant his eyes lit on the blankets.

Was that not a movement?

Yes.

The blankets stirred.

He saw that there was some living object beneath them.

In a second he was striding toward them.

Then came a smothered report, followed by a puff of smoke, and a bullet hissed unpleasantly close to Green Mountain Joe's ear.

But he never budged an inch as he strode onward, drawing his long, gleaming knife.

In another instant he was kneeling on the

blankets with one hand on a writhing object, while that containing the knife cut a slice down the covering, exposing the form of a man.

For a moment the old trapper knelt there, looking sternly into the upturned eyes with a glance of demoniacal fury.

"What's ter pervent me cuttin' ther black heart outen yer, Nat Gleason?" hissed Joe, as his huge breast rose and fell from the violence of his passion.

"I don't know," replied the man, who was the one who had carried the pack after the trembling wretch in the center of the floor had dropped it on the mountain path; "but I don't believe you will!"

"Why not?"

"Because, if you do, you'll never see her again."

"Ha!" gasped Joe, losing his hold, and grasping wildly at his heart.

"You needn't take it so harsh, Joe," said the man. "I don't mean you any harm, if you'll only leave me alone."

"Gol blame yer skin," shouted Joe, "what did ye mean by firin' at me, then?"

"It was a mistake; the pistol went off by accident, man."

"I believe ye lie!"

The man's eyes lit up with a malignant fire, but he knew too much to expose himself in the presence of the gleaming knives, so he held his tongue.

"Get up!" shouted Joe, rising to his feet, "I want ter speak with yer."

Nat Gleason made no reply as he attempted to obey, but while doing so made a quick motion to his companions.

The next moment two rifles were leveled at the back of the old hunter.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SMUGGLER'S OATH.

It was a moment fraught with deadly peril to Joe, who stood wholly unconscious of his danger.

But Sam Willis sprang to his aid, striking up the rifles of the smugglers with his own as the bullets whistled harmlessly through the ceiling.

"Cuss ye, ye miserable whelps!" shouted he, dealing a stout kick in the stomach of Saul Slingsby, doubling him up like a jack-knife. "I've half a mind ter brain ye on the spot!"

The boy's eyes fairly flashed fire as he elevated his rifle to carry out his intention.

But the Yankee peddler, who was caressing his injured paunch with the utmost solicitude, threw down his weapon, and ducking the blow, dodged into a corner like a whipped cur, making no attempt at resistance, while his companion, with a surly look, lowered his weapon, drawing sullenly back.

Joe heard the shots and slightly turned his head, but upon seeing Sam's move he turned again upon the wretch at his feet.

"That's yer little game, is it, Nat Gleason?" hissed he, delivering the smuggler a stout kick with his moccasined toe. "So you didn't mean me no harm—oh, no!"

The smuggler winced with pain, but he dared not attempt reply.

"Get up, I tell ye," continued Joe, "I want ter talk ter ye, and see that ye don't attempt no more roots, or it'll be bad for ye?"

Nat complied sullenly.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded he, as he rose to his feet.

"I want ter know whar she is, and how ye left her?" replied the hunter, in husky accents.

"She's well," answered the smuggler, "but I can't tell you where unless she says so; she says she never wants to see you again."

"It may be so," said Joe, "but I shan't believe it until I hear it from her own lips, or see it in black and white under her own hand."

"You know how bad you treated her, Joe," replied Nat Gleason.

"I admit all that," answered Joe, "and I was a mean hound ter do it, but she might have left me like an honest woman 'ithout takin' up with one wuss'n me, no matter how bad I was."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you, Nat Gleason."

"That depends upon circumstances," was the reply; "you know you treated her like a dog."

"Yes, but that was when I was drunk."

"You were seldom otherwise, Joe; you never drew a sober breath."

"But that won't save her after becoming your—"

Before Joe could finish the sentence Nat Gleason held up his hands with a warning gesture.

"Stop, Joe," said he, setting his teeth firmly together, "don't you ever let that lie pass your lips again, for I won't hear it from even you—she is as honest and as true a woman as ever breathed the breath of life. I'll swear it by the living God!"

Joe stood regarding the speaker with a look of incredulity.

"I know it," said he, finally, half to himself, "I know it, until ye came between us with yer sneakin', cantin', psalm-singin' ways; but then she turned agin me like wormwood, and finally fled me as if I'd been a pisen adder."

"That was because you wouldn't give up your cups, Joe."

"Do you mean ter tell me that there was never nothin' betwixt yer?"

"Nothing wrong, so help me Heaven! She has never been more to me than a sister."

"Ye know she took shine ter ye afore she married me?" hissed Joe, with a savage look in his eyes.

Nat nodded his head.

"That was ended when the wedding occurred," replied the smuggler. "She was nothing to me after that!"

"But ye came betwixt us all the same!"

"It was simply my duty as a Christian," retorted Nat; "when I saw her suffering as she did through your evil ways, it was my duty as a member of the same church to befriend her. I simply carried out the letter of the golden law."

"Wagh!" retorted Joe, with a motion of disgust. "I don't take no stock in sich teachin'. 'What God has put together let no man part,' was what ther parson said when he jined me and Sadie; and I don't believe God ever taught no other docterin ter no other parson, even though ye claim ter be one yerself, Nat Gleason!"

"But I tell you he did."

"Wagh, ye fix ther law ter suit yer own personal interests, Nat Gleason."

"No."

"What yer doin' now?"

"Peddling!"

"Smugglin', yer better call it."

"No."

"Whar d'ye get yer goods?"

"In Canada."

"I know it, but ye don't pay no duty?"

"I don't mean to; I hadn't ought to."

"Why not?"

"Because Canada ought to belong to the United States."

"That may be true," retorted Joe, "but law's law, and the States suffer all the same; ye take yer furs and sich like across the line 'ithout molestation, and sneak in yer peddlin' geer 'ithout payin' a single red; ain't that chiselin' ther government, eh?"

Nat Gleason hung his head, but made no reply.

"That's about ther size of it, I reckon," continued Joe, "and ye can't put it in any other light; a man that'll swindle one way 'll do so another and hadn't ought to talk Scriptor or law to carry him out. But I didn't come hyer ter chop law 'ith ye, Nat Gleason; I came ter find what ye'd done 'ith my wife, and I'm goin' ter do it. Ye say that she's nothin' ter ye, but she's all ther world ter me; my life, my soul, my eternal salvation, so if ye're a true Christian, as ye pretend to be, I demand her back at yer hands. I'm a straight, square, honest, sober man now, Nat Gleason, as all ther folks of Marlbro and that vicinity 'll tell ye; try it and see if I don't speak ther livin' truth, and if I don't ye can shute me for a liar—tell Sadie so if you find I speak ther truth, tell her that I ain't seen her in ten long, dreary years, and I'm hungry for her, and if thar's a single spark of true, womanly love lingerin' in her bosom she'll come back ter me and forgive and forget the past."

Nat Gleason stood and regarded the old trapper curiously for several minutes.

"Do you mean what you say, Joe?" inquired he, finally.

"I do, so help me God!"

"I believe you," replied Nat, holding out his hand; "will you accept this as a token that I mean to bear your message to your wife, and effect a reconciliation if possible?"

"Yes, on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"That you swear it on Holy Writ!"

"With pleasure."

Turning to the pile of goods on the floor, the smuggler picked out a small pocket Bible with gilded clasps.

Opening it, he held it reverently up, turning his eyes toward Heaven.

"I swear it by the sacred book, and all that I hold reverend in heaven and earth, to carry this message of Joseph Walmsley to his wife, Sarah, and intercede earnestly with her on his behalf, that she may become reconciled to him, and restore him to her affections as a true and a loving husband. So help me God—amen!"

Joe's eyes filled with tears.

"Ye've made my heart glad, Nat Gleason," said he, grasping the smuggler's hand, "and may Heaven be as good ter ye as ye've been ter me."

"Amen!"

"That'll do, that's all I expect or depend on," said Joe, as he turned to Sam; "come along, Sammy; I'm ther happiest man in ther world, so I guess we'll finish ther hunt."

And then, notwithstanding a cordial invitation from Nat to stop to dinner, the old hunter quitted the cabin, followed by his young admirer.

How unfortunate it was that neither observed the dark and malevolent look that the smuggler cast after them as they closed the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

As they quitted the smuggler's cabin, Joe Willis led the way across the clearing, and entered the pine forest. Choosing another path, he cut across the mountain to the spot where he had camped the previous night.

"I'm goin' arter ther dogs," said he, in explanation to Sam. "I left them thar because I didn't want 'em along; they are just chain lightnin' ter mind, and I'll bet we find 'em just whar I left 'em."

This proved the case, for when they reached the spot they found the poor brutes just where Joe had left them.

They pricked up their ears and wagged their tails, but never attempted to move until Joe called them.

"Good boys, good dogs," said Joe, clapping his hands; "come Snap, come Turk, I forgive ye for goin' back 'onter me 'ther way yer did this mornin'; come hyer!"

In an instant the two fox-hounds sprang to their feet, and leaped toward him with barks of delight.

It was evidently all made up between them.

Joe's next move was to go to a hollow in the rock behind his couch, from which he took a haunch of venison.

Cutting off several chunks, he cast them to the dogs, who devoured them ravenously.

Then cutting off a couple of juicy steaks, he built a fire, and placing them in a frying-pan, they were shortly frying away, emitting a fragrant and savory odor.

When they were done, Joe spread them upon a couple of square stones, and sitting down, both he and Sam enjoyed a hearty meal.

"That's somethin' like," said Joe, wiping his lips as he finished, "and now I guess we better go look up the rest of the traps."

"Are you comin' back here ter-night?" asked Sam.

"Nary a time," replied Joe. "We'll quarter furdur up that mountain. Come, Turk, come, Snap, we're going out, boys."

The dogs yelped their delight as they capered and leaped around their master.

Picking up the frying-pan and a pot, with a couple of tin panikins, Joe swung them on his back, and shouldering his rifle, the two chums started briskly up the mountain.

They passed the first trap and came to the next.

"Nothin' hyer," said Joe, examining it; "it ain't even sprung. I'm in bad luck ter-day, it seems, but it won't do ter grumble about trifles. Come along."

Then they walked on again.

They had scarcely proceeded forty feet, when the report of a rifle was heard behind them, and a metallic sound rang from the iron pot on Joe's back.

"That was meant for me," said Joe, wheeling about and bringing his rifle to bear; "but the pot saved me. At 'em Turk—snap 'em, Snap!"

In an instant both dogs leaped into the

bushes, growling savagely, and Joe and Sam bounded after them.

The sound of pattering feet was heard tearing through the bushes in advance.

Then a growl and a cry of pain were heard, and the report of a rifle followed.

One of the dogs gave a yelp.

"That's Snap," said Joe, as he hastened on, "and some one's hurt!"

The next moment they were out in a clearing.

Lying flat on the ground was one of the Indians, with Turk tearing vigorously at his throat. A little beyond Snap was tackling another. That left eight, who were returning to the aid of their companions.

As they saw Joe and Sam leap into the clearing, all uttered a fierce shout, aiming their rifles at them.

But the hunters' arms were up as quickly.

Crack!

Crack!

Two of the redskins fell weltering in their gore.

Then Joe and Sam sprang toward the others.

The six faced them, discharging their pieces, but the bullets flew wide of the mark.

"Gol blame yer ugly picters!" roared Joe, his eyes flashing savagely, "ye wouldn't leave me alone, and ye must stand the consequences!"

The next instant he was on one of the Indians, slashing away at him with his knife.

Sam followed suit.

But Joe's adversary was game, now that he was in for it, and fought desperately, while the others hastened to his aid.

Two of the Indians tackled Sam, thinking that they could easily get away with a mere boy, but they found their mistakes.

Sam put his knife through the heart of one, and drawing it out dripping with blood as he fell writhing in the agonies of death, turned quickly upon the other.

The fellow was a burly savage, and as Sam lunged at him with the knife he darted aside, warding off the stroke with his rifle-barrel, which he dropped.

Then grasping the boy in both arms, he hugged him like a bear.

Sam had no chance to use his arms; he was completely done up.

But he had a friend at hand—Turk—who had made short work of the Indian by tearing his throat from ear to ear, left him dying and sprang upon Sam's assailant with dripping jaws.

In a second he mounted the Indian's back, burying his fangs in the redskin's spine.

He fell back beneath the weight of the dog, and as Sam felt himself free he plunged his knife completely through his heart.

Meanwhile, Joe was in a desperate fix; he had four of the stoutest Indians to contend with.

They were cutting and slicing away at every vulnerable point.

But Joe was as wiry and supple as an eel, and, turning quickly as each struck home, he parried off the strokes with his knife or rifle, returning blow for blow in dire desperation.

Cut!

Down went one of the Indians with the blood pouring from a deadly gash in the throat.

Slash!

Another fell with his face severed from nose to chin.

Thrust!

The deadly knife severed the heart of a third!

Then Sam was at his side, but, before he could strike a blow, Joe's foot slipped and he fell, with his antagonist upon him.

Then came a savage bay.

Snap had finished his man, and rushed to the assistance of his master.

CHAPTER IX.

A GRAVE IN THE MOUNTAIN RIFT.

SNAP, true to his name and nature, made a savage snap at the Indian who was strangling the life out of Green Mountain Joe.

His gleaming fangs penetrated the flesh just back of the left ear, cutting a gash that caused the redskin to wince and roar with pain.

But the maddened dog never loosened his grip as he tugged stoutly away, tearing the Indian free from his prostrate master.

The Indian strove frantically to release himself from his perilous position, and twist-

ed and squirmed, vainly endeavoring to stab the dog with his knife.

But Snap leaped nimbly back, and biting again, transferred his hold to the Indian's neck.

Although the brave dog was bleeding freely from a bullet wound in the head, he held his grip, shaking the gigantic savage as a cat worries a rat, while the latter cut and slashed away in dire extremity.

But although the keen blade wounded the dog again and again, he never flinched as he tore and lacerated the Indian's throat until the blood spurted like a fountain from his lacerated jugular.

"Good boy—good dog!" said Joe, as he rose, panting from the violence of his recent struggle, encouraging Snap by clapping his hands.

"Sick him—kill him!"

The dog's blood-shot eyes turned responsively to his master, and wagging his tail he resumed the attack more furiously than before, carrying out the order to the very letter, until the Indian was as dead as a mackerel.

"That settles it," said Joe, grimly patting the dog's head as he pulled him loose. "Old Snap's game to the backbone, and don't you forget it."

The dog licked his master's hand as if he thoroughly comprehended every word.

"You bet," said Sam, "that settles 'em, as you say."

"Kerrect!"

"I didn't expect ter have any such tall game ter pop at when I started out so early this morning," said the boy.

"Nor me nuther," answered Joe, "but the red cusses brought it all onter themselves, and their blood's on ther own head; I wash my hands of it."

"It ain't none of my funeral," coincided Sam, "but are ye goin' ter let 'em lay as ye did ther other one for some of their friends ter look up?"

"Wall, I should calculate not," answered Joe; "one lesson of that sort's enough for yer uncle. I'd like ter let 'em lay for ther wolves ter polish off dead certain, but it 'ud be rather risky arter what occurred just now, so I suppose you better lend me a hand ter bury 'em."

"How are you goin' ter dig a hole in this rocky ground 'ithout spade or pick-ax?" asked Sam.

"I don't need ter dig no hole," replied the trapper.

"How so?"

"Bekase thar's one dug already close by."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, ye've heard of the Green Mountain rift, hain't ye?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's right over yonder, not a stone's throw off, and I'll show it ter yer if ye'll lend a hand 'ith one of the red-skins?"

"Certain."

Sam and Joe seized up the body of one of the dead Indians by the legs and shoulders carrying it between them, Joe taking the advance.

Just a little beyond the clearing where the fight with the Indians had taken place, a solid wall of granite reared up to the height of nearly a hundred feet.

Around the verge ran a narrow path with a precipice fully two hundred feet beneath, and from this perch the village of Malbro and the slope and valley of the Connecticut, with its noble river and bordering of verdant farms and undulating woodland, was plainly visible.

"By Jinks!" ejaculated Sam, as the exquisite picture opened to his view; "that's just scrumptuous!"

"Just so," retorted Joe, "but we ain't no time ter view nature until we bury ther dead; ther'll be time enough for that after."

Sam made no reply as he followed Joe until they turned again, coming into the rift in the mountains, as it was termed.

It was a rude and rugged scene that struck the boy's eyes as he reached the spot.

Just beyond the spur of granite upon the mountain side stretched a range of slate of vast proportions. In the center was a huge crevice, or rift, where the elements had hewn away millions of tons of the stone, carrying them down to the valley beneath in an avalanche.

"That's er grave dug by natur'," said Joe, dropping the Indian's head upon the rock to wipe the perspiration from his brow. "D'ye see that hole down thar?"

Sam looked over the cliff where Joe was pointing, and saw a well-hole of nearly twenty feet in diameter hollowed out of the solid rock.

The sight caused him to wince, as he drew slightly back and turned pale.

"Yer needn't be afeared," said Joe. "Ther ain't no danger unless yer miss yer footin'. But it would be a long fall, and knock ther wind out of a fellow before he reached ther bottom, for that hole's over three hundred feet, ter say ther least. Seel!"

He stooped down as he spoke, disengaging a piece of slate and dropping it over the precipice.

Nearly thirty seconds elapsed before the plump of the stone was heard in the water beneath.

"That's where I mean ter bury ther reds," said Joe. "Ain't it a proper spot ter let 'em rest till Gabriel blows his horn?"

"Yer right" said Sam.

"Here goes!" said Joe, seizing up the Indian's head. "Now—one, two, three, and away he goes!" and with a swing that carried it ten feet clear of the rock, the Indian's body went whirling down the yawning gulf, and plumped in the water beneath with a sickening splash.

The remains of the other nine were similarly disposed of, and then the two chums sat down to rest.

"I see this when it happened," said Joe, "and I reckon I was ther first one that knowed anythin' about it until it went tearin' down ther mountain inter ther valley, carryin' death and destruction ter everything in its course. It was the grandest and awfulest sight I ever see in my life."

"It must have been," said Sam. "Pray tell me all about it."

"Waal, I don't care if I do," answered Joe, drawing one leg comfortably over the other, and patting his moccasin carelessly with his hand. "Ye see, I had been out tracking a gray wolf up the mountain, and I'd just reached this very spot afore I caught sight of him, and hove up ter fire. It had been raining like blazes for close onter two weeks, and it was in the month of September. It hadn't stopped, and was coming down straight as a wedge when I see the wolf."

"Waal, as soon as I'd hove up I pressed the trigger, but the bloody gun missed fire. I didn't like it a bit, and just started some tall cussin', but I hadn't time ter get out a word afore ther came a report like thunder, and then I see a shaft of slate weighin' fully ten ton shute up from the spur as if it had been fired by a blast, and go tearin' and tumblin' down the mountain."

"It took me desprut, for I had no thought of such an event; but the next moment I was clean flunked, for with a rip and a roar that made my hair stand and ears ring and tingle, I see ther top of ther mountain quiver like a reed and shake like an earthquake. The huge pines and cedars underlaid like a field of wheat in a north wind."

"Then all ter onct the whole mountain side split away with a crash that shook the air like an explosion of a mine, and rocks and trees, mud and water, came rushin' through the air with a force that nearly took away my breath and whirled me to the earth as if I'd been a grain of wheat. I could see the trees and rocks shuten past like a railroad train at full speed, tearin' and tumblin' down the mountains like mad, carryin' everything before it."

"Down, down, it swept till it reached the valley yonder, trees fell, houses smashed ter pieces like egg shells, cattle and horses fairly vanished; and in less than ten minutes thar wasn't a single sign of a house or life ter be seen in an are' of two miles!"

As Joe finished speaking, Sam's breath almost ceased, so deeply was he interested.

"It must have been perfectly awful," said he, finally, as he recovered his composure.

"It was just stupend'us," replied Joe. "Ther force of the returnin' air after the slide went by nearly stunned me. I don't know how on earth I managed ter keep my mind and holt on as I did, but when I come to and looked down on ther damage done, I must say that I couldn't help thankin' my Maker for sparin' me alive when He'd carried so many ter death and eternity."

"I don't wonder either," coincided Sam, with bated breath.

"But ther ain't no use thinkin' 'bout that now," said Joe; "poor Snap's pretty badly

used up, and I must attend ter him afore I do anything else."

Calling the dog to his side, the trapper examined his wounds with the deepest attention.

He found that beside the bullet-wound that he had six severe cuts upon the back and breast, from which the blood was pouring freely.

The poor animal was growing weak, and Joe immediately fell to work to stanch the blood.

This he did by shaving off the hair about the wounds with his knife and applying pieces of buckskin cut from his hunting-dress, sticking them on with resinous pitch procured from the adjoining pines.

By this time the sun was setting behind the mountain, shading the lonely spot in gloom, and as both Joe and his companion were exceedingly fatigued from the exertions of the day they lit a fire, and wrapping themselves in their blankets lay down, seeking their hard-earned repose.

CHAPTER X.

THE MIDNIGHT WOLVES.

JOE was so excessively fatigued that he fell asleep almost instantaneously, but Sam lay for some time watching the day fade into night until the stars appeared.

His last thought was of his father and mother, and then a sense of tranquillity overpowered him and he fell into a deep sleep.

So sound was his slumber, that he had no remembrance of what had taken place, or where he was, when he was awakened by a sense of something cold touching his face.

Rising on his elbow, he looked around in a half-dazed condition, and as his senses returned, he saw what appeared to him to be two balls of fire peering at him through the darkness.

Rubbing his eyes to discover if he was fully awake, he again saw the flaming orbs, and then he heard a low snarl.

By this time Sam noticed that there was a large object close to him, and he could hear it breathing with perfect distinctness.

At first he thought that it was one of the dogs, but on looking toward the fire, where they lay when he fell asleep, he saw that they were both there and sleeping soundly.

But still the breathing of the animal, whatsoever it was, was perfectly distinguishable, and looking toward it, he again saw the flashing red eyes blazing in the darkness.

By this time the sky was so completely obscured by dense, black clouds, that not a star appeared, and everything was so dark around him, with the exception of the flickering fire-light, that he could scarcely see six feet distant from where he lay, but as he strained his eyes to their utmost, he saw the swarthy object crawling noiselessly toward him.

Sam was a stout-hearted boy, but for a moment he felt the cold chills running up and down his spine as clammy drops of perspiration beaded his brow, but plucking up with a desperate effort he arose upon his knees.

The moment was none too soon, for scarcely had he gained the position before the animal sprang at him with a bound.

So quick was the motion that Sam had scarcely time to draw his knife before he felt two sharp claws upon his arms, and then a twinge of pain rent his frame as two sharp fangs were fastened in his left shoulder.

A growling snarl followed.

Sam knew in a second that he had been attacked by a wolf.

His first thought was to call to Joe for assistance, but the next determined him to fight it out alone; so darting out his left hand he fastened his fingers securely on the shaggy neck of his assailant, and drawing back the other he struck boldly out with the knife.

The wolf drew back with a yelp as the sharp blade penetrated his throat, cutting a fierce gash, but the next instant he made another snap, burying his fangs in Sam's other shoulder.

The pain occasioned by the bite was intense, but Sam held stoutly to his grip as he turned his knife up, drawing the blade across the wolf's fore paw.

A gush of blood followed the stroke as the injured limb fell limp and useless, with the tendons severed to the bone.

Again the wolf let go its hold with a yelp, making another attempt to bite, but as it did so Sam drew back his knife, burying it up to the hilt in its breast.

A warm spurt of blood followed the stroke that almost blinded Sam, but he could feel the animal weakening at every stroke, as he buried the blade again and again in its quivering bosom, until finally, with a grunt, it fell over dead.

As it did so Sam leaped to his feet, wiping the perspiration from his face.

At the same instant a series of fierce yelps was heard in every direction.

"By Jingol!" said Sam, tossing a heap of brush upon the expiring fire, that's a whole pack of 'em upon us!"

In a moment the fire was blazing brightly up, and by its light Sam saw nearly twenty wolves tearing toward him in a body!

There was not a moment to lose, so stooping down he shook Joe stoutly by the shoulder as he seized up his rifle, which hitherto he had been unable to use; at the same time he shouted loudly to the fox-hounds.

Both Joe and the dogs were up instanter. The old man rubbed his eyes vigorously, but as he saw the approaching monsters he, too, grasped his rifle and stood on the defensive.

"Sick 'em, Snap!" shouted he, bringing his rifle sharply up; "at 'em, Turk!"

Crack!

Crack!

The reports of both Joe's and Sam's rifles rang out almost simultaneously on the midnight air, and two of the foremost wolves bit the dust, writhing in the agonies of death.

"Good boy!" shouted Joe, as he saw the animals fall, "that's ther way ter do it; keep it up lively, Sammy, and I'll be wid ye in a minute!"

By this time Sam had loaded again and popped off another one, Joe rapidly following suit.

Meanwhile both Snap and Turk had tackled the wolves in dead earnest, as their growls and the yelping of their antagonists plainly attested.

"Look out that ye don't hit the dogs, Sammy," said Joe, warningly.

"Never ye mind me, governor," retorted Sam, "look ter yerself; I'll paddle my own canoe!"

Crack!

Crack!

Two more wolves fell weltering in their gore.

But the others came stoutly on, with the exception of those who were struggling with the hounds.

Crack!

Crack!

Two more fell dead, but by this time the others were upon Joe and Sam and commenced attacking them with vicious determination.

But the two chums kept on loading and firing as swiftly as possible, kicking and stamping stoutly away at those assailing their heels, and now and then bringing the barrels of their rifles down with a crushing thud upon the head of some more determined assailant than his mates.

But it was a desperate battle and nearly fifteen minutes passed before it was ended; when on counting the spoils the hunters discovered that they had killed twelve wolves, not counting the leader, whom Sam had disposed of in person.

"That makes a baker's dozen," said Joe; "not so bad a night's work of it, Sammy, arter all; but how on earth did yer manage ter h'ar 'em? I was sounder 'en a bug in a rug."

"I don't know myself, pop," said Sam, informing Joe of how he had been awakened, "it must er been providential, for I was sounder than the seven sleepers myself."

"Well, ther varmints won't trouble us agin ter-night," replied Joe, "for ther ones that hain't been wounded by us and ther dogs 'll be too pesky skeered ter try it on agin."

"Why so?"

"Bekase ther comrades'll tell 'em all about it."

"Nonsense!"

"Nothin' of ther sort. Animals can talk as well as humans. I'm as firmly convinced that they have a language of their own as I am that I've a nose on my face. But I'll fix it so that they won't come back—see if I don't."

Joe fell to his work with his ax and felled several good-sized pine trees, which he cut up into suitable lengths and ranged in a semicircle from the precipice, hemming in the spot where they had been lying, and setting them in a blaze, secured a cordon of fire, when

lying down again they were both presently as sound asleep as if nothing unusual had happened.

It was nearly five o'clock the next morning when Sam Willis woke again.

The morning was extremely dark, for the clouds had not dispersed during the night.

"Oh, blazes!" ejaculated he, looking lugubriously around; "it's blowing up a storm, and I'm afraid it'll spoil our hunt. What d'ye think about it, Joe?" asked he, addressing the trapper, who had just got up himself.

"Yes, pufectly right, Sammy," responded Joe; "we're goin' ter have a rip roarer, and it ain't no manner of use growlin' about it neither; man proposes and Providence disposes, any way yer can fix it. But never ye mind, young feller, yer can come up again some other time, and we'll have a jolly old time of it."

Sam's face dropped, but he said nothing, as he helped Joe to pack up the blankets and get breakfast ready, which being ended, they did up the rest of the trappings.

"Ye needn't look so all-fired glum about missin' ther hunt, Sammy," said Joe, consolingly, as soon as they had completed the operation, "for we made an excellent night's work ter pay for the mishaps of yesterday; we've got thirteen wolves here, and their heads are worth twenty dollars apiece bounty, which makes one hundred and thirty dollars for each of us, for I mean ter dervide equal—that ain't bad to take, is it?"

"Jewhiterker! do they pay that?"

"Certain."

"Why, ye must make a mint of money, Joe."

"Wall, I'm comfortable, Sammy," said the old man, smiling grimly, as he commenced cutting off the wolves' heads and stringing them on an osier twig; "but come along 'ith me, and I'll show ye somethin' better."

So shouldering their traps, they commenced retracing their steps toward the camp of the previous day.

CHAPTER XI.

A SORE DISAPPOINTMENT.

It was near half-past ten when the two hunters reached the camp where Green Mountain Joe had the fight with the panther described in the opening chapter of our story.

The skin was still stretched on the ground where Joe had fastened it after removing it from the dead panther's body, for he had covered it with underbrush, but the polished bones were all that remained of the animal, the flesh having been gnawed cleanly away by the hungry wolves.

"That's ther way the brutes would have served us out, Sammy," said Joe, pointing to the gleaming skeleton, "if we hadn't waked up so quick."

Sam shuddered at the thought, while Joe unpegged the skin, and rolled it up in a compact package suitable for carriage.

Having done so he left it lying on the ground, and rising to his feet fastened his eyes upon Sammy's with a keen look of inquiry.

"Say, Sammy," said he, "can I trust ye with a secret?"

Sam looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"What d'ye mean, pop?" asked he; "what d'ye mean, after trustin' me with all ye have durin' the last twenty-four hours?"

"I know it," said Joe, thoughtfully to himself; "the gossips and busy-bodies down in Malbro would give ther right ears to know what ye learnt in Nat Gleason's log hut yesterday afternoon, they would, by Ginger! But ye'll keep it quiet, won't ye, Sammy; at least until I give ye leave to tell?"

"Certain, pop," answered Sammy, proudly. "I'd let them cut out my tongue by the roots afore I'd give you away!"

"I believe it, Sammy," replied Joe, wringing his young comrade's hand warmly; "and I'll tell ye ther whole story when I have more time than I have at present; but I can't do it now, for I want ter take these heads and some pelts down ter ther village and dispose of 'em. I might as well do it while ther storm threatens, for I can't do anythin' else that I know on. You'll lend a hand, won't ye?"

"Certain."

"Wall, now, I'll tell ye the secret."

Sam seemed all eyes and ears.

"How would yer like ter make a fortin', Sammy?" asked Joe.

"Fust rate."

"Well, I reckon we can make it," continued Joe. "Sammy, I believe I've discovered a vein of silver!"

Sam's jaw dropped, and his eyes bulged out like saucers.

For a moment he thought that his old friend had gone out of his senses.

"What—d'y'e—ye—mean?" stammered he, as soon as he had recovered sufficient breath to ask the question.

"Just what I say," answered Joe, calmly. "Ye needn't stare at me in that fashion. I'm as sober and clear-headed as ever I was in my life. Come and see if I don't speak the truth."

Joe led the way as he spoke to the spot where he had slipped during the fight with the panther and fallen into the trout brook.

Then, kneeling down, he cautiously removed the bed of moss that he had replaced when Sam called him while coming up the mountain side.

During this operation Sam bent anxiously over him, with his eyes fairly riveted to the spot.

Presently a line of white shining metal was revealed.

"What d'y'e think of that, Sammy?" asked Joe, turning his eyes brightly into the boy's face.

"Is that silver, Joe?" inquired Sam, scarcely able to breathe.

"Yes, I believe so," answered Joe, wiping the perspiration from his brow, "and our fortune's made, for I mean to make ye my pardner."

"Whose fortune is made, Joe?" inquired a soft, oily voice close beside him.

Both Joe and Sam looked around as if they had been shot.

Had the master of evil appeared before them in proper person, with hoofs, tail, and all the other paraphernalia attributable to him, they could not have been more surprised. They had deemed themselves utterly alone.

Neither believed that a living object was near, but there, standing just above them, with a bland smile upon his countenance, was Nat Gleason, with the peddler's pack upon his back.

Joe's first thought was to hide the vein, but before he could do so Nat bent down and looked curiously at the shining metal.

"What have you got there, Joe?" said he, in his soft, oily voice.

"Nothin'," retorted Joe, giving Nat a wicked look.

"What yer doin' hyer, and whar did ye spring from, Nat Gleason?"

"You needn't look so angry, Joe," replied Nat, good-humoredly. "It's a mere accident I can assure you. I was just going down the mountain to dispose of my wares, and chanced to take the path—that's all; but I'm glad that I met you, for I want you to write a letter for me to deliver to your wife. She may doubt my word, but a letter will set matters right!"

"I ain't no scholar," retorted Joe, doggedly, "and you know it, Nat Gleason; besides that, whar am I ter get paper and sich like, up in this mountain?"

"Oh, I can remedy that," replied Nat, removing his pack and placing it on the ground. "I always carry such materials with me. I can write the letter and you can sign it; if you doubt me, possibly your young companion will read the letter and see that I treat you right. He looks like a sharp, honorable young man."

"I'm agreeable," replied Sam.

Joe made no remark as Nat removed a small writing-desk from his pack and commenced writing.

When he had finished he handed the letter to Sam.

"Read that," said he, "and see if it is all right."

Sam read the letter aloud.

"DEAR WIFE:—You know that I am no scholar and no hand at letter-writing, but I have got Mr. Gleason to write this letter for me. He assures me that you are willing to return to me if I will keep sober and do my duty by you. My darling, I mean to do this, so help me God. I pray you to forgive the past and return to me; you will find me a changed man, and will never regret the step. Mr. Gleason will explain all; you know him, and can trust him as I do.

"YOUR LOVING HUSBAND."

"That sounds all right, don't it, Sammy?" asked Joe, after a brief consideration. "I think I can sign that 'ithout harm."

"It seems all right to me," replied Sam.

"Wall, here goes, and God help me to get back my Sadie!"

The tears stood in the old trapper's eyes as he signed his name in straggling letters to the missive, and then he handed it to Nat Gleason, who put it in an inner pocket, and commenced doing up his pack again.

"Now, look ye, Nat Gleason," said Joe, wiping away the tears with his sleeve, as his features hardened again; "I have trusted ye, and believe in ye, though it goes agin ther grain ter do so, arter all that's passed. But ye have sworn on this Bible ter help me, and God forgive ye if ye don't, for I never will."

"You have no cause to doubt me, Joe Walmsley," retorted Nat, stoutly. "You never had—lying tongues raised the foul slander against your wife's honor that came to you. If I can lay hand upon the ones that did it, they shall suffer the direst penalty, never fear."

"They shall die if I do!" retorted Joe, icily, and his face denoted that he meant precisely what he said.

"'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord," quoted Nat Gleason, sternly.

"Wall, I'll take a hand in!" shouted Joe, "and make it sure; don't you forget it!"

"I'll do my part, Joe," said Gleason, "and you can place implicit confidence in me. But what is all this about a fortune that you were explaining to our young friend so confidentially?"

"Wall," replied Joe, shrugging his shoulders and making a wry face, "seein' as how ye come upon us so suddint, and it can't be helped, I'll tell ye—but I hope ye'll not give it away."

"I promise!"

"Good enough; I've discovered a vein of silver."

The peddler's eyes flashed with a mercenary light as he stooped down to examine the spot at which Green Mountain Joe was pointing.

"Do you call this silver?" asked he, after a moment's pause, looking up with a derisive smile.

"Yes."

"Give me an ax!"

Joe complied.

Gleason elevated the helve, and striking a heavy blow buried the blade some distance in the shining ore.

"If that was silver," said he, "you couldn't cleave it in that manner; it's nothing but lead."

CHAPTER XII.

NAT GLEASON'S PROSPECTUS.

BOTH Joe and Sam Willis' faces presented lugubrious and comical expressions of dismay at the announcement of the peddler.

"D'y'e mean ter tell me 'at that's true, Nat Gleason?" inquired Joe, with a gasp of dismay.

"Yes, Joe, as sure as yer born," replied Nat, smiling at his crestfallen look, "but you needn't take it to heart for all that; a lead mine ain't such a bad spec' to work, and this vein promises well by the prime quality of the ore; I should say, although I'm not much versed in such matters, that it was the pure thing; and if there's plenty of it, why we can make a big thing of it."

Then turning, while Sam and Joe stood watching his movements with considerable interest, Nat commenced cutting out several pieces of the lead in small square blocks which he placed carefully in his pockets.

"Now look ye, Joe," said he, after he had completed the operation, "and you, young man, too, you must be vey cautious and say nothing about this find, for if you don't keep it dark some of the sharpers from New York or Montreal will snap it up and take the wind out of our sails. I'm going to see your wife first, Joe, and I have no doubt that I can make things right between you, and then I go to Montreal to purchase wares. While there I shall get this ore examined, and if it turns out as good as I think it is I'll get some one to back us in the monetary line, and purchase up as much ground in this region as possible; then we can start a joint stock company and become perfect nabobs, which after all, is almost as rich a prospect as if we'd struck a small vein of silver."

Nat Gleason's prospectus seemed so dazzling with promises of future wealth, that both Sam and Joe rubbed their hands, chuckling with satisfaction, utterly forgetting for

the time being that they were the first discoverers of the rare bonanza to which he was now laying claim and ownership, as if he were to be the "we" of the expected boom, leaving them simply "us and company."

Meanwhile, thus rattling on, the glib-tongued peddler had been digging along the vein with the blade of the ax, carefully laying aside the mossy sod.

His face seemed glowing with gratification as he continued his task.

"It's a perfect Golconda," said he, finally replacing the sods carefully in their original position; "a mine of wealth, Joe, our fortunes are made, and if you keep sober, as you have promised to do, your wife will be the happiest as well as one of the richest women in Vermont."

"Do you really mean that?"

"I do," responded Gleason; "I'm sure of it. I've a snug little sum to back this up myself, and I can raise lots more; but you mustn't either of you give it away."

"We won't; will we, Sammy?"

"Nary a time, pop. I'm as dumb as a dead hen."

Joe's eyes were filling again with misty drops.

"Nat Gleason," said he, "you've made me the happiest man in Varmount, and if ye'll only bring my Sadie back to me I'll bless ye as long as I live."

"Don't trouble your head about that, my friend," answered Gleason. "I know that it's to your interest to reform, and shall tell your wife so. We are in for it now hand and glove, and I shall stand to you through thick and thin!"

Joe was so overjoyed at the bright prospect that he wrung the outstretched hand again and again, utterly forgetting the past or that the pretentious friend had fired a nearly fatal shot at him the preceding afternoon.

"And now I must be going," said Gleason, re-shouldering his pack. "Keep everything dark, good friends, and the Lord let the light of his countenance shine upon ye!"

He shook his hands re-assuringly toward them and commenced descending the mountain, while they stood watching him until he disappeared from view.

"Say, Joe!"

"Wall, Sammy?"

"D'y'e know I don't take ter that feller wuth a cent, not'ithstandin' his soft sodder; yer better watch him er he'll play yer foul."

"Yes—but, Sammy, ye see how he's stood ter me about Sadie."

"Meanin' yer wife?"

"Yes."

"Wall, ye didn't look at it in that same light yesterday, pop."

"I know it, but he's taught me different since; he's sworn that all I heard was a lie, and promised ter bring us tergether again, and I must trust him; he only knows whar she is, and he's goin ter bear her word."

"Wall, maybe he is," responded Sam, doubtfully. "I don't want ter sour yer on him, old man, but I'd watch him pesky sharp, I would, and don't ye forget it!"

"What'uld ye do, Sammy?"

"Do! Why, I'd dog him every step until I see him carry out his promise by deliverin' that letter. I'd drop everythin' until I learnt all; but if it's all right it's all right, but if it isn't that 'uld settle it 'ith me for good and all."

"By gol, Sammy!" said Joe, "you spit it out like a scholar and a lawyer. I'll take yer advice and do it, but I'll try and not let him know it. I tried to foller him afore, but he was too sharp for me; but I was drinkin' awful then."

"Wall, don't ye do it now, then," advised Sam. "Keep a clear head and a sharp eye, and ye'll bring down the game every time; but, meantime, we'd better keep our find dark until we see what he's going to do about that; he's considerable taken on that, I can see, and will look ter it for personal interest."

"You bet! yer just shoutin', Sammy, but come along; we'll take down the furs and dispose of 'em, for I'll want some money ter foller him up."

Sam nodded his head, while Joe took the blankets, bidding Sam follow him closely.

"Come along," said he; "I've got something else to show you. Thar ain't no one watchin' us now, is there?"

Sam looked carefully around and replied:

"No."

Joe led the way around the rock previously

mentioned, and drawing aside a tangled mass of cat-briars, revealed a dark, narrow opening, which apparently led down into the bowels of the earth.

Sam looked at the black hole in surprise.

"Whar in blazes are ye goin' now?" he asked.

"Come along and see," replied Joe, smiling. "This is my fur wardrobe. I've got quite a pile of 'em stowed away below, and I reckon some of the traders'd like ter make a raid on 'em—I do, by Jingo?"

Leading the way down a winding path, which grew pitch dark as they proceeded, Joe was followed closely by Sam.

Some six or eight minutes passed in utter darkness, and then the path gradually grew lighter, until finally they came out into a large cave, some twenty feet high and as many in diameter.

The light penetrated through a rift in the rock above sufficiently to afford a view of the cavern, but, as the sky was overcast, it was still very dark.

But by the dim light Sam saw that the walls were completely covered by dried skins of various animals, some of them piled in stacks, while the more valuable were suspended on pegs driven into the crevices of the slate rock.

"Why, this is just prime," said Sam, "but how comes it that it's so dry, don't the water come in through that hole?"

"Nary a time; it's shed off by a bed of slate, and the rain pours down inter the trout brook like a cataract when the heavy rains come in the spring and fall."

Just then the distant rumble of thunder was heard, and the ground seemed to tremble beneath their feet.

"Wasn't that thunder?"

"Yes," replied Joe, "it always sounds just so down here. I believe this range of mountains is of volcanic origin, and some day or another ye'll hear somethin' from it, see if ye don't."

"Wall, maybe if I don't some one else will."

"You bet," answered Joe, "but we must get ther skins together, and be gettin' afore the storm falls, for it's going to be a snorter; I can tell it in my bones; I've lain out too long on the mountains ter be deceived."

As he finished speaking, Green Mountain Joe fell sharply to work and gathered up a pile of skins that would have astonished an army pack mule to carry, which by the aid of Sam, were conveyed to the plateau above the cave and done up into two huge bundles.

Then the blankets, traps, cooking utensils, etc., etc., were hidden in the mouth of the cave, when, asking Sam to carry the wolves' heads and panther skin, Joe shouldered the other bundles and his rifle, leading the way down the mountain; and, while he did so, to use Sam's remark, he presented precisely the appearance of an animated haystack, so cumbersome and ungainly was his load.

CHAPTER XIII.

GREEN MOUNTAIN JOE ON TRIAL.

IN this manner the two friends proceeded toward the little village of Marlboro, which lay just at the foot of the Green Mountains.

As they passed Sam Willis' house, his mother stood in the porch and hastened to the gate.

"Whar ye been, ye everlastin' good-for-nothin'?" asked she, giving her son a kiss. "I was desperate took about yer stayin' out all night."

"Couldn't help it, mamma," replied the young hopeful; "had ter stay along with Joe. Wouldn't missed it for the world."

Pointing to the wolves' heads.

"Mercy alive! whar did yer get all er 'em?" asked the astonished woman, with her eyes as big as saucers.

"Shot 'em!"

"Do tell?"

"Honor bright; ask Joe."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

"Why, that's a perfect fortin', Sammy."

"I know it."

"Come in, both of ye, and get somethin' ter eat; dinner's most ready."

"Couldn't possibly do it, mam," replied Joe; "it's goin' ter rain like wild-cats, and it might spile the furs. I want ter get 'em down ter Squire Chase's before it comes down."

"Well, come back, will ye?"

"Certain."

Joe's reply came from a turn in the road to which he had been hastening without stopping further than to nod to Mrs. Willis as she hailed him and Sammy while passing.

Meanwhile, as soon as he had kissed his mother again, Sammy hastened after his comrade; but on reaching the curve in the road, a strange sight struck his gaze a slight distance in advance.

Standing in the road at a distance of some twenty feet or so, was Joe, hemmed in by a crowd of villagers to whom he was gesticulating and shouting wildly, while they kept gathering closer and closer around him.

"Mercy on us, what's the matter with Joe?" shouted Sam, as he witnessed the scene and started on a run toward the spot.

"I tell ye I'm goin' right thar now," Sam heard Joe say as he came up; "take yer beggarly hands off me or I'll punch yer in the snoot; I don't 'low no man ter lay hands on me 'thout cause."

"But I have cause," replied Job Wormley, the village constable. "I've a warrant from Squire Chase ter arrest yer."

"Don't know nothing 'bout that thar," retorted Joe, shoving away the legal document which the puffy constable was flourishing bombastically in his face, "I can't read writin' nor print, so go long, an' if Squire Chase wants ter see me, he'll see me durn soon for thar's just whar I'm goin' as fast as my legs'll tote me."

"But ye've got ter come along 'ith me, I say," shouted the constable until his face turned as red as a turkey cock's comb.

But before he could finish another sentence, Joe's stalwart arm shot out from the covering of skins, and his clenched fist took the officer of the law just beneath the snout, sending him to grass instanter with the claret pouring in streams from his nostrils. And before he had recovered sufficiently to gain his equilibrium again, Joe had dashed through the crowd, who made way rapidly enough, and started on a run toward the Squire's office.

Squire Chase kept the main grocery and general country store in Marlboro, and in another room close at hand held his court.

As Joe charged down the street, with the excitable rabble following at his heels, but taking excellent care to keep at a safe distance, owing to the constable's recent disaster, Squire Chase, the doughty, short-legged, fat-paunched, broad-shouldered, red-faced, bald-headed, and spectacled-nosed justice of Marlboro, chanced to be standing in the doorway of his office.

"Why, bless my life," shouted he, "what's this coming down the street at such a mad rate? Do my eyes deceive me, or have I got the boys?"

But the next instant he saw who it was, and stood on his dignity and the defensive.

"Stop where you are!" shouted he, waving Joe back, and ducking behind the door-post of the office.

"Say, squire, do you want to see me?" inquired Joe, coming to a dead stop; "say?"

"Y-e-s; but wher's the constable?" stammered the astonished justice, poking his head around the jamb.

"Oh," retorted Joe, "if you sent him arter me, judge, he didn't take me. I dropped him behind and come on alone, for I had some furs to dicker on, and I always tend ter business matters fust!"

"In that case," replied the squire, coming out again, "you best drop 'em in the store, Joe, and the clerk'll tend to 'em; then come in here, for there's a serious charge against you that must be seen to!"

Joe bowed and did as ordered, when he returned to the squire's office.

By this time Sam and the constable, with the rest of the villagers, had come up, and as many as possible thronged into the little office, while others gathered in knots outside, or jostled each other to look through the door and windows.

"Hallo, Sammy!" said Joe, as Sam came in, accompanied by the constable; "it seems ter me as if I was under arrest."

"I'm in the same box, pop," answered Sam, cheerfully, "but I can't find out what for; Job Wormley refused to tell, and rather than have the trouble you did, I came along."

"Wall," replied Joe, smiling grimly, "I calculate that Job got the worst of that trouble."

By the way the constable was nursing his injured proboscis, it was evident that he was of the same way of thinking.

Meanwhile the justice had been arranging his papers, and presently he called the court to order.

"Joe Willis," said he, blowing his nose with a sonorous sound, "you and Samuel Willis are charged with murder!"

"What for?"

"For murder!"

"Yum!"

The court nodded its head.

"Who makes ther charge?" inquired Joe. "Me!"

An old Indian, evidently the worse for an overdose of fire-water, staggered unsteadily towards the desk.

"We-me-luck!" said Squire Chase, looking sternly at the Indian, "you have been drinking since you came here this morning; you are drunk, sir!"

"Yes," grunted the Indian, "me very drunk, but the white trapper kill my red brother all the same."

Again the court nodded its head and read the complaint, in which it was stated that early on the previous day Joseph Willis and Samuel Willis had willfully and maliciously wounded, slain and killed a member of the Can-o-chet tribe, named San-ta-na, better known as Black-Snake-Gil.

"Ugh!" grunted Joe, "so the murder is out. I deny ther charge in to-to-to! If any one's ter blame it's me, and I'm willin' ter stand by it if I swing for it, but I don't believe I will. I had all ter do with it, and Sammy's as innocent as an unborn angel."

CHAPTER XIV.

GREEN MOUNTAIN JOE'S BEST HIT!

IN a few words Joe made a succinct statement of what had occurred in regard to the death of the half-breed, which, having been detailed in a previous chapter, it will be unnecessary to repeat.

"And this is the fact," said the court, peering owlshly over its spectacles; "you are willing to swear to it, Willis?"

"Yes, sirah."

"And you too, Sam?"

"Every time."

"I don't see what's to be done about it," said the court, thoughtfully scratching its left ear with the nib of a quill pen.

Then it turned and held a whispered consultation with the clerk.

"If it is permissible I think that I may be able to shed a little light on this subject," said a soft, oily voice close to the door.

Turning in the direction of the sound all hands saw Nat Gleason, the peddler, standing in the opening.

"Ah! Mr. Gleason, I am glad to see you," said the court, "and shall be glad to hear from you."

Without being sworn, the peddler made a brief statement of his meeting with the Indians who had stated that they were in search of some one, and putting this statement and Joe's together the judge decided to dismiss the case; declaring the court adjourned.

A cheer rent the room at the decision.

Just then a flash of lightning lit the gloom, and a sonorous peal of thunder shook the earth.

"Hark!" shouted the old Indian, gnashing his teeth with rage, "it is the voice of the Great Spirit displaying his wrath at the wrong done to me and mine!"

And then he strode rapidly away amid the jibes and jeers of the bystanders.

After receiving the congratulations of the judge and friends, Joe went into the store and disposed of his furs to good advantage.

The bounty on the wolves' heads was also paid and divided with Sam, when the whole party adjourned to the tavern to take a drink at Joe's expense.

By this time the rain was coming down in torrents, and as Joe stepped out on the tavern steps after paying his score he found himself face to face with Nat Gleason.

Nat beckoned Joe to follow him, and they walked to the end of the piazza.

"I have sold out," said the peddler, looking around to see that no one was within earshot; "and I start north to-night. Have you any further word to send to your wife?"

"No," replied Joe; "do all you can, and tell her that I shall keep my word; but all depends upon her decision. My fate is in her hands."

"Just so," said Gleason. "You can see that I mean to keep faith with you by my appearance in court on your behalf. Keep up

good courage and we'll be millionaires before six months are over our heads."

"All right."

Joe grasped Nat's hand, but after a brief pressure he drew it away.

"That's all," said he. "Now we mustn't be seen together again, for it might rouse suspicion. But, by the way, were those Indians looking you up?"

"Perhaps."

"Oh, I see you don't want to tell. Well, perhaps it's just as well to keep one's secret."

"Perhaps. A still tongue never hurts any one."

"That's true."

And with this reply from Gleason the two separated.

Gleason returned to the bar-room, while Joe remained where he was.

Presently he felt a touch on his arm, and turning, he saw Sam Willis.

"What makes ye look so glum, pop?"

"Because I feel glum, Sammy," replied Joe. "I'm goin' ter see Sadie ter-night likely, and have it all out, then and thar."

"You don't say! Have you learnt her whereabouts?"

"Not exactly, but I mean ter. Gleason is goin' ter her ter-night, and I mean ter follow as ye advised."

"Good enough," replied Sam, rubbing his hands; "but you'll have ter keep yer eye open; that preachin' peddler is as shrewd as a fox."

"I know it, but I'm goin' ter beat him ter cover, all ther same."

"What yer goin' ter do 'ith ther dogs, pop, they'll give yer away?"

"No, they won't nuther," replied Joe. "I've thought of all that, Sammy. I'm goin' ter leave 'em 'ith yew. They won't take kindly ter it, I know, but we must chain 'em up, treat 'em kind and feed 'em. I shan't be gone long, and shall return whatsoever happens."

"All right, pop, you can depend on me."

"I know it, Sammy, you're ther only livin' friend I ever had."

The two shook hands warmly, and then whistling to Turk and Snap they went toward Sam's farm through the driving rain.

It was nearly dark the same evening.

Owing to the cold storm which was raging outside, a large fire was roaring in the broad chimney of the tavern bar-room. Around it were gathered a knot of idlers listening to We-me-luck, who, having recovered from his rage, had returned to the bar-room to make a night of it.

The old Indian was very drunk, and had been amusing the tavern loungers with reminiscences of his deeds of valor.

"But all these were nothin'," said We-me-luck, boastfully, as he returned from his fifth trip to the bar, where he had just finished nearly a tumblerful of raw spirits, "to the fight near Niagara, when Col. Van Rensselaer crossed the river to attack Gen. Brock at Queenstown Heights."

"There was three hundred militia under Col. Van Rensselaer and three hundred regulars under Col. Christie, which were to be followed by Col. Fenwick's artillery."

"Col. Van Rensselaer crossed first with one hundred men, but he had no sooner landed from the boat than he received four serious wounds, but he never flinched as he gave the command to storm the fort."

"The men charged boldly up the heights and drove the British from their guns, but before they had retreated far, the British Forty-ninth came into line and charged the Americans."

"The boys fought hard and killed Gen. Brock and his aid, Captain McDonald; but seven hundred was too great odds, and although Van Rensselaer, after being driven over the river, recrossed with reinforcements and repulsed the enemy, another line of British troops came up with three hundred Indians, turning the battle; completely routing the Americans and driving them over the river, killing and capturing many."

"Upon reaching the other bank, Van Rensselaer endeavored to get his demoralized troops in order, but before he could do so eight hundred British regulars from Fort George hove in sight, and renewed the attack. A brief struggle ensued, when the Americans were forced to surrender themselves as prisoners of war."

"That must'er been a putty hot fight, old copper-nose," said one of the bystanders, winking to his companions.

"Yes, very hot," retorted the old Indian, "and I was in it. I was one of the Indians who came to the aid of His Majesty."

"You ought to be proud of it!" said the other, disdainfully, "and if I wan't younger'en you I'd punch yer snoot!"

The old Indian was too besotted by his potations to notice the storm that was rising against him, and continued his story.

"Well, the night of the battle I came to camp with my braves, and Captain Barnwell told me to take twenty of my braves and capture a party of Americans who were hiding in the woods some four miles distant. I gathered my braves together and started."

"I had nearly completed the distance when I saw a log house by the side of the road."

"As we passed it I saw a light shining through the window-curtain, and just then a shadow crossed. It was that of an American officer."

"Ha! thinks I, that's one of 'em, and I'll take him too. So going up to the door, I knocked loudly. The light went out and all was darkness; but I continued knocking, calling for them to open or I would break in the door."

"They finally did so, but by the feeble light the woman carried, I could see that there was no one in the room but her, a little girl of six, and a baby in the cradle."

"Where is that officer that was here just now?" I demanded.

"There was none," replied she, as brazen as life.

"There was," said I, "and he was drinking out of this, for I can smell the fresh spirits?"

"As I spoke I seized up a tumbler half full of rum that stood upon the table near the window with a black bottle beside it, and filling the glass I drank it down."

"It's a wonder you didn't take the bottle too."

"I did," retorted the noble savage, with a maudlin leer; "I followed up with that and it fired me with a bright thought."

"Yum."

"I know that he was here, for I see his shadow on the curtain," said I, "and I mean to make you tell me where he is."

"Striding to the cradle, I seized up the sleeping baby and raised my tomahawk over its head."

"See here," said I, "if you don't tell me where he is in less than a minute, I'll brain your child on the spot!"

"The woman gave a shriek and went down on her knees in a second, and so did the little girl."

"Don't kill my baby brother! Don't kill my child!" cried they both in a breath, while I stood looking at them.

"But ye didn't do it, did ye?"

The question came sternly from Green Mountain Joe, who had been sitting in the corner of the fire-place, as he rose from his seat.

"What's that to you?" growled the Indian, glaring defiantly at him, "supposing I did?"

"Why, that!" roared Joe, with his eyes ablaze, "you miserable, sneaking, cowardly skunk!"

In an instant he seized up one of the fire-irons from the blazing back log, before any one present could comprehend his meaning, or prevent the stroke, he dealt the Indian a desperate blow upon the forehead.

We-me-luck fell senseless and bleeding to the bar-room floor, as Joe with a roar like a wild beast dashed out into the storm.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE TRAIL.

As the old Indian fell to the bar-room floor, prostrated by the blow from the fire-iron, Joe had seized his rifle from the corner and dashed out into the blinding storm.

In an instant a scene of the wildest confusion ensued.

Old Adams, the landlord of the tavern, who had been serving out a fresh supply of New England rum to three new-comers, dropped his muddles and darted toward the spot from whence a loud outcry arose.

"What's up, boys?" asked he.

"Green Mountain Joe's at his tricks again!"

"The dickins!"

"Yes, he's just killed old We-me-luck!"

"More luck ter him," responded the landlord, sotto voce. "I wish the old cuss was dead for good and all; he's the cussedest old Injin I ever see!"

But notwithstanding his remark, he bent down over the prostrate figure on the floor and felt of his pulse and heart.

"He ain't dead much," said he, "he's the liveliest corpse I ever see! What caused the row?"

One of the by-standers told him.

"Served the tory redskin right!" responded the landlord; "but it won't do to let him die right here; so some of you run out for a bucket of water, and we'll see what can be done."

One of the idlers ran for the water, and the landlord went behind the bar, returning with a tumblerful of raw spirits.

He poured a portion in his hand and bathed the bleeding wound over the Indian's forehead.

The injured savage gasped and twitched spasmodically, and then the landlord poured the rest down his throat.

We-me-luck spat and sputtered, his breast rose tumultuously, but notwithstanding his lack of wind, he swallowed every drop of the spirits, and then, as his eyes opened, he sat up and gazed stupidly around.

"Me killed!"

"Not much," responded the landlord.

"Good!"

We-me-luck staggered to his feet.

"Whar's Green Mountain Joe?"

"Gone," said one of the bystanders.

"Good! Me get 'im yet."

And without another word the wounded Indian started from the bar-room in search of his assailant.

"I'm glad the old cuss is gone!" said the landlord. "What'll ye take, boys?"

A shout greeted the invitation as the door closed behind the Can-o-chet chief, and all hands ranged toward the bar.

As Joe quitted the bar-room and ran down the tavern steps, some one hailed him:

"Is that you, Joe?"

"Yes," responded our hero, coming to a sudden halt.

"He's just gone down the road."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, there's some one with him."

"Who was it?"

"Can't tell, it's too all-fired dark ter see."

"Come on!"

Joe ran down the street, followed closely by Sam Willis.

It had been arranged between them, after dining with Mrs. Willis, that Joe should return to the tavern, while Sam kept watch on Nat Gleason, in order to inform Joe when the latter started for the North.

"Have ye got the hoss ready, Sam?" asked Joe.

"Yes, he's in a clump of cedars up street," answered Sam, then lowering his voice, as he ran on: "Nat's yonder, talking 'ith the feller I was speakin' of."

"All right."

Presently they approached a snake-rail fence just beyond the limits of the village, where a low swamp, with elderberry bushes bordering it, ranged along the road.

"He's yonder," whispered Sam.

"In the bushes, hey?"

"Yes."

"All right; just you wait here 'til I come back, maybe I can find out who's 'ith him."

Joe crept away.

But Joe did not succeed as well as he anticipated, for when he reached the spot where Nat Gleason was conversing with his companion the rain fell so furiously, and the night was so dark, that he could scarcely see, but he thought from the voice that it was Saul Slingby; in fact, after listening a minute or so he became convinced that it was.

"So you must go to-night?" he heard the Yankee ask.

"Yes."

"It'll be a blame rough trip."

"All the better; there'll be no one on the watch. It's a splendid night."

"Yes—for ducks."

"Have you got the furs all packed?"

"Yes, there on the horses, close at hand."

"That's good! Then we'll be off at once."

"But what am I to do?" asked another voice, that was utterly strange to Joe.

"Stop here and keep a sharp eye on—"

The rest of Gleason's words were cut short by a raging blast of wind and a blinding burst of rain, that almost swept away the old hunter's breath.

But, as the rain ceased a little, Joe heard the man reply:

"All right, I'll keep him in tow."

And then he had scarcely time to dart into

the underbrush and conceal himself before the three men passed him so closely as to almost jostle him.

"By jingol!" gasped he, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow, "that was a pesky close shave! I came mighty nigh gettin' snapped up!"

Then he waited some five minutes, when he rejoined Sam Willis.

"Did ye make anything out, pop?"

"Nothin' ter speak of, Sammy; but they're off, and I must get lively or I'll miss 'em in the darkness."

By this time they had reached the clump of cedars, and Sam brought out the horse which he had borrowed from his father.

Joe leaped into the saddle, and shaking him warmly by the hand, rode off in the blinding storm.

It was but a little after half-past seven when Green Mountain Joe laid We-me-luck sprawling on his back with the andiron, and it was hardly half an hour when Nat Gleason started for the Canada line in company with the Yankee peddler.

It was as much as Joe could do to keep up the lumbering farm horse to the pace, the old fellow having never been used to over a six mile an hour gait.

But he managed to keep them within ear-shot by the sound of their horses' hoofs in the muddy road or rock-bedded path.

Meanwhile, the rain poured down in torrents, and rather increased than decreased in volume. But the vivid lightning and the heavy peals of thunder that heralded the storm had long since ceased, and the rain kept coming down heavier than ever.

"Hey!" said Nat Gleason suddenly, drawing in his horse, "what was that?"

"It sounded like the footfalls of a horse upon the bridge we just passed," replied his companion.

"Possibly we are followed," said Gleason. "I must find out."

Turning back, he rode toward the bridge.

Just then a wild shriek of almost human agony resounded on the night air.

The two smugglers reined in their horses and stood peering at each other through the darkness.

"It was the death cry of a horse," said Slingsby, trembling in his saddle.

Nat Gleason whipped up his horse toward the bridge, but as the animal's fore-hoofs struck the planks it reared upward with a neigh of terror and utterly refused to stir. So sudden was the halt that it nearly unhorsed the smuggler, but springing to the ground he went out on the bridge, only to pause almost as suddenly as his steed.

"Great heavens!" he gasped. "The bridge is broken in the center! It has been carried away by the fresh!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A RAY OF HOPE.

As previously stated Green Mountain Joe had followed Nat Gleason and his comrade as closely as possible to avoid detection himself.

Just before they reached the bridge mentioned at the conclusion of the previous chapter, he had been forced to hide, as he had so frequently done during his ride.

He could hear the tramping of Nat and Slingsby's horses as they trotted across the bridge, and fearing that they would hear his also, had paused some minutes to give them a chance to go on before he followed.

Thinking that they had done so, he started again, but he did not know that they had halted on the opposite bank, and thus it was that they heard his advance.

As he did so, he could hear the wild rush of the rising freshet which came pouring down like a cataract from the mountains.

"Blame the thing," said he, "it's as shaky as a bad egg; I hope it'll carry me safe over!"

He had scarcely uttered the words before his horse came to a dead halt and strove to wheel round, but Joe pulled the reins taut and struck him a stout stroke on the side of the neck.

With an angry snort the animal leaped forward, and Joe could feel the bridge tremble and shiver beneath his tread; then a crash followed that seemed to shake the frail structure to the center.

A huge tree, carried down by the foaming torrent, had struck one of the stanchions of the bridge, which wavered, shook, shivered and went over into the raging waters with a crash.

It was at this moment that Nat Gleason and Saul Slingsby had heard the last despairing cry of the frightened horse; it was at this moment that Joe found himself struggling for dear life in the swollen stream, as the broken timbers of the bridge and floating trees and planks dashed heavily against him.

It was pitch dark, the water was mercilessly whirling him hither and thither, as it swept down stream at a rate of nearly fourteen miles an hour.

He knew that he could scarcely swim a stroke, but the old horse was sinking rapidly while kicking and struggling to stem the current; thus, unless he meant to go under too, he must free himself and trust to luck to reach the shore alive.

So disengaging his feet from the stirrups, he leaped from the horse, leaving him to his fate, and struck out boldly for the nearest shore.

It seemed as if it was utterly useless to contend longer. His arms were growing so tired that he could scarcely move them; his legs began to manifest symptoms of the cramps, and he was on the point of giving up as lost, when suddenly he felt something dash against him in the darkness, and then something cold touched his cheek, and a bristly head touched his face.

He made a desperate blow at his assailant, but the next moment a low whine struck his ears as a pair of sharp teeth penetrated through his hunting jacket, partially grazing the flesh, and then he felt himself being pulled toward the shore.

He struck against it, and at the same time his arms came in contact with a large rock, on which he seized a stout hold.

For a few moments he remained there resting and gasping for breath, and then he drew himself up on the bank and lay down; as he did so the animal that had aided him began licking his face and hands, and stretching out the latter he discovered that it was one of his own dogs.

"Hallo, Snap! hallo, Turk!" shouted Joe, petting the faithful hound's head.

The dog responded with a low whine at the latter name, as the old hunter continued addressing him.

"So it's you, Turk," said he; "how on earth did ye get away? I thought that I fastened ye pretty securely."

The dog simply wagged his tail and whined in return, as the hunter continued his caresses, brushing off the dripping water from his shaggy coat.

While doing so he came to a stout rope around his neck, upon examining which he uttered a low whistle.

"I'm blowed if this cuss ain't gnawed himself free," said Joe. "Bully for yew, for if it hadn't been for ye, Turk, I'd been a gone coon, and no mistake."

The dog manifested his perfect comprehension of his master's words by wagging his tail, but never emitted a sound as he followed closely in Joe's tracks, who had arisen from his seat and started toward the road.

They had proceeded in this manner some five minutes or more, when they struck a ledge of rock covered by scrub-pines that Joe considered too high to surmount in the darkness, so taking a detour, he started around the base.

The range ran some quarter of a mile to the northward, when it broke off at the verge of a clearing.

Upon reaching this place Joe saw a ray of red light spreading out into the clearing from what he soon found to be an open doorway of a log cabin.

By the aid of the light which emanated from a huge log fire that was blazing in the broad, open fire-place, Joe saw a couple of horses standing in front of the cabin door, from which two men were busily engaged in removing bundles.

Joe recognized Nat Gleason as one of the men, but he saw something else the next instant that caused his heart to bound, as a genial light sparkled in his eyes.

It was the appearance of a woman at the open door, bearing a lighted tallow-dip.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MIDNIGHT SHOT.

"Was it his wife?"

This was the first thought of the old hunter, as he stood eagerly regarding the strange apparition.

But before he could satisfy himself the door closed suddenly and all was blank darkness again, as the wind rose with a piercing shriek and swept the blinding rain into his face.

But Joe had no thought for the storm or of his dripping garments as he commenced crawling cautiously toward the cabin.

He passed half way round it, regarding it with the utmost scrutiny until he came to a window through which a light was shining, shedding a long ray out into the darkness.

Close beside the window was a narrow bench, on which Joe immediately clambered, and by this means gained a glimpse into the interior of the apartment.

It was perfectly empty.

Joe sighed; he had hoped to see his wife, but he was disappointed.

The next moment, however, his heart beat hastily again, as he saw Nat Gleason enter the room accompanied by a woman.

Well it might, for as the light struck her face he saw that it was the wife upon whom he had not set eyes in ten long years.

Time had not changed her much, but Joe thought that she looked sad and care-worn; but he pressed his ear closely to the window-sill as he saw her lips move.

"So you have seen him at last?" he heard her say.

"Yes!"

"How does he look?"

"He is greatly changed!"

"For the better?" asked she anxiously.

"Yes, and no."

"Was he sober?"

Gleason paused, and then replied:

"Yes, but he looks very old."

"I suppose so. He was not young when I left him. Do you think he has reformed?"

"He says so."

She nodded her head thoughtfully.

"What is he doing?" she inquired.

"Hunting, up in the Green Mountains, back of Malbro."

"Do you think he has reformed?"

"The people in the village speak well of him," replied Gleason. "They say he never comes into the village except to sell his furs and purchase powder and shot, sometimes a small stock of provisions."

"Does he drink at all?"

"Very seldom. He simply carries up a small demijohn of spirits for medical purposes."

"I am glad of it. Do you think it would be safe for me to see him?"

Gleason paused thoughtfully again before he replied, but finally spoke.

"I don't know how to advise," said he. "You must trust alone in divine Providence and your own feelings. I have told you all. Read this."

Joe saw him hand her the letter he had written up in the mountain.

She read it slowly, and wiped her eyes at its conclusion. He could see the tears standing in them.

"I think I can trust him," she said, consigning the letter to her bosom.

"I agree with you," cried Gleason, "but I think you better leave him on probation for awhile. Supposing you write a letter in reply, that you will give him six months longer to prove his repentance, and that if at the end of that time reports are favorable you will return to him again, forgiving the past as he requests."

"I don't know but that would be the best plan," she replied; "when will you see him again?"

"In two or three weeks," answered Gleason.

"I go on to Montrel to-morrow, and when I return I shall see him with your reply. You see that I have promised to do so by the letter."

"I'll have it ready then."

"I think you better write it now," answered Gleason; "it is likely that I shall not return this way."

"I will do so."

Joe saw his wife seat herself and take out a pen, ink and paper, and commence writing. How his heart yearned to leap in through the window and clasp her to his breast, to urge her to forget and forgive all now and take him as he was.

Just then he heard a sound at his side, and then he felt Turk tugging away at his leg.

Looking to ascertain the cause, he heard

the sound of horses' footfalls and then he saw a man go by with two horses.

Joe ducked down his head to hide his presence as the light from the window displayed the sight.

But as soon as the man had passed he looked up again, and pressing a kiss on his hand, tossed it toward his wife.

Crack!

The sound of a rifle rang out in the darkness, and Green Mountain Joe fell heavily forward against the window panes, which crashed beneath his weight.

Both Gleason and the woman darted to his side, and as the wife saw the ghastly features of her husband, she uttered a piercing shriek and fell in a dead faint at his side.

The smuggler's face was as black as the elemental strife outside.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As the report of the rifle rang out clear and sharp through the raging storm, Green Mountain Joe fell with a crash against the window of the log cabin. Turk uttered a savage growl and leaped quickly into the darkness.

The next instant a fierce cry of pain and alarm announced that he had tackled and injured something; in fact, he had fastened his sharp teeth through the nether garments of a man who was retreating rapidly toward the woods, and they had bruised and lacerated the flesh.

But with a savage oath the wounded man turned and dealt the faithful hound a terrific blow upon the head with his rifle.

Turk released his grip and fell to the earth quivering as if in the throes of death; but recovering wind with a moaning cry he sprang at his assailant, who had again started for the woods.

But the dog was close at his heels making another snap at his legs.

The brute turned and dealt another stunning blow at poor Turk, who keeled up again more seriously injured than before, while his assailant effected his escape.

Meanwhile, as has been described in the preceding chapter, upon being shot Green Mountain Joe's weight carried him through the fragile window frames, and as he swooned from the concussion of the bullet, he fell bleeding to the floor.

Upon seeing her wounded husband, Mrs. Walmsley had fainted in turn, leaving Nat Gleason standing a surprised and enraged spectator of the scene.

"Furies!" shouted Nat Gleason, as he gnashed his teeth and pressed his hands together until the finger nails met in the palms; "this will ruin all."

Turning quickly he ran into the next room, which was the kitchen, and returned with the water-pail. Removing the tin dipper, he laved the brow of the insensible woman with water and dashed several handfuls in her face.

Then placing his hands over the lungs, he worked them like a bellows to restore respiration. Presently his efforts proved successful, for she gasped and shivered, and then a faint flush animated her cheeks as her eyes unclosed with a startled stare.

"Where am I?" she muttered.

"You are safe," replied Gleason; "be calm; it is not so bad as you surmise!"

For by her eyes he could see that as she recovered she remembered all.

"Yes, yes," replied she, faintly, "he is not dead, then?"

"No, he will recover presently; calm yourself. Do you feel better?"

"Yes."

"I was afraid that the sudden shock would kill you."

"No, no; I am much better now."

And to certify the fact she sat up and wiped the water from her face and neck.

Meanwhile Green Mountain Joe lay ghastly pale upon the floor, with the red blood pouring in torrents from a gaping wound over the left temple.

"See to him, for Heaven's sake, see to him; do not let him die!" moaned the wretched wife, wringing her hands piteously, and pressing her lips passionately to the wounded man's lips.

"It's a bad one," said Gleason, tracing the course of the bullet with his finger, "but not necessarily fatal. The bullet went in just back of the left ear, and passing through, cut off the tip and gashed the temple. He is still insensible, but he is coming round."

"Oh!"

Joe uttered a deep moan and moved uneasily on the floor as Nat Gleason finished speaking.

Joe groaned again and turned over; then he sat up, and clasping his head with both hands, gazed around with a stupefied glare.

"Where am I?" he asked, as soon as he could speak.

"Safe," replied Gleason.

"Joe, my poor darling," moaned his wife, kneeling at his side, "thank God that you are spared to me yet!"

"Who fired that shot?" demanded he sternly as he looked savagely at his blood-stained hands.

"I'm sure I do not know, dear," replied his wife.

"I didn't ask you," retorted Joe curtly, as he pushed her away and then staggering to his feet, he turned on Nat Gleason like an enraged panther.

"I asked you, Nat Gleason! Who fired that shot?"

"I don't know."

"Ye lie, curse ye! ye lie!" roared Joe, fairly beside himself with rage; "it was that skunk Saul Slingsby, for I see him go by the house with the horses just afore it was fired. It couldn't a been no one else!"

"How did you come here?" demanded Nat.

"I hain't got time to answer questions. Tell me where Saul Slingsby's now, or I'll wring it outen yer black heart!"

"I don't know."

"Wall, I'll find him."

"I'm sure he had nothing to do with it, Joe," said Gleason, barring his path as he started toward the door. "Don't be foolhardy, and do something in passion that you'll regret at a calmer moment."

Gleason had scarcely finished the sentence before the door burst suddenly open and Saul Slingsby sprang into the room.

"Any one hurt?" cried he, and as he witnessed Joe with the blood pouring over his face, he turned as white as a sheet.

"Yes," retorted Nat. "Who fired that shot?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Saul; "but as soon as I heard it I turned and saw a man darting toward the pines. There was a dog in hot pursuit."

"That was Turk," said Joe to himself.

Just then there was a scratching sound on the outside of the log cabin, and then Turk bounded into the room, with his rough coat covered with mud and the blood pouring from an ugly wound on the scalp, which had been cut by the rifle barrel of his assailant.

"That's the very dog now," said Slingsby, who was staring from Joe to the dog as if he considered them both ghosts.

"Then you didn't fire that shot Saul Slingsby?" asked Joe, starting toward him.

"No. What on earth do you mean?"

"Honor bright?"

"Dead certain."

"I believe ye."

"Where are ye going, Joe?" said his wife, as he started toward the door again.

"Ter look up ther skunk that tried ter kill me!" retorted Joe, with flashing eyes.

"But you're badly wounded, husband."

"It's only a scratch, Sadie," replied Joe, wiping away the blood with his hand. "I'll have that man's life, whomsoever he is!"

"Oh, don't go, Joe!" pleaded the wife.

"Vengeance is mine!" said Gleason, solemnly.

"I'll see ter that," retorted Joe.

"But, husband!" urged Mrs. Walmsley.

Joe gently put away the loving hands that rested upon his shoulder.

"Sadie," he said, looking lovingly into his wife's eyes, "have no fear for me. Ye said just now that ye'd allow me six months probation to prove me honest; ye didn't know I heard it, but I did, and I was goin' back ter do it. I heard false stories about ye, darling, and forgive me if I listened ter 'em; if that skunk hadn't fired at me ye'd never know'd that I was listening at the winder. When ye want hear from me again send word to the Malbro post-office, and I'll come. Good-bye, God bless yer!"

He bent forward and pressed a kiss on his wife's lips, and then whistling to Turk, he darted from the apartment and the cabin.

CHAPTER XIX.

JOE FINDS THE TRAIL.

As Joe quitted the apartment, Mrs. Walmsley sprang towards the door with a wild cry

rising to her lips, but Gleason caught her in his arms and placed his hand over her mouth.

"Hush!" hissed he, in her ear; "can't you see that he is not himself, the wound has crazed him!"

"Merciful powers!" moaned the wretched woman, turning as white as death, "can this be true?"

"It is," replied Gleason. "Calm yourself, stop where you are, and Slingsby and I will follow him—in his crazed state he cannot go far before we reach him—and bring him back."

"Will you?"

"I swear it!"

Mrs. Walmsley sank into a chair completely prostrated.

Meanwhile, on reaching the outside of the cabin, Joe went to the window where he had been shot.

Stooping down he examined the muddy ground.

He could see the footprints of Turk in the soil, for, notwithstanding the raging storm and the dense darkness, his eyes were as keen as a hawk's.

While doing so Turk pulled him by the sleeve.

"I understand, old fellow," said Joe; "go out."

Then as Turk darted away he sprang after him.

Presently they were in the woods, the dog leading the way, but he hadn't gone far before he stopped and commenced sniffing the ground, then he ran to a tall tree, and uttered another growl.

"Treed him, hey?" gasped Joe. "Lay down."

The dog obeyed, swaying his tail restlessly from side to side.

Joe swung his rifle on his back, and drawing his knife placed it between his teeth.

Then he commenced climbing the tree. He examined every branch, but discovered nothing, and was on the point of descending when he found a broken twig.

"I see," said he, to himself, "the skunk went into the next tree."

The next instant he swung himself into the adjoining tree, but here he was also at fault, and descended to the ground.

"Come hyer, Turk!" shouted he, to the dog; "find him, boy!"

Presently they were both on the verge of the roaring torrent.

The dog commenced running up and down the bank with his nose scenting the ground, and then he stopped with a baffled growl.

Joe bent down and examined the bank in turn.

"Thar's been a boat hyar," said he to himself, "and that's the way the skunk came and went. I wronged Nat and Saul arter all!"

Then he rose up and uttered a string of savage oaths.

Just then a huge log came tearing down the stream.

It lodged for an instant against the bank.

Joe pointed to it and motioned to the dog, who leaped upon it; then seizing up a long pole that lay upon the bank he leaped upon the log and shoved it into the surging water.

The log swayed and wavered, but Joe kept his feet, and, darting the shove-pole rapidly from side to side, set the log toward the opposite bank.

The rushing water caused it to shake and tremble, but by his strong nerve Joe managed to cross safely and leap upon the bank as the log whirled stoutly away in the eddy. But Turk was before him, and another howl called his attention to him.

Darting to the spot Joe saw the dog bending over something.

Stooping down he discovered that it was an Indian canoe.

"Ha!" gasped he, "I understand it all now—it was that red skunk, We-me-luck!"

Joe bent down to examine the ground.

"I thought so," said he. "The red-skin had a horse, and has taken the back track; but I'll make him pay dearly for this yet!"

CHAPTER XX.

With a wicked light in his eyes, Joe made a motion to his dog and started toward Malbro, Turk running on in advance.

But after they had gone a mile or two poor Joe began to weaken from loss of blood.

He felt a sickening, nauseating sensation creeping over him, and, although he fought

stoutly against it, it finally overcame him, and staggering like a drunken man, he reeled into the underbrush and fell into a dead faint.

It was about five o'clock on the morning of the events described in the preceding chapter, and, although the skies were dark, the storm had ceased.

Sam Willis had arisen and dressed himself, to do up his usual farm chores.

On going to the barn, where he had left Snap and Turk securely fastened, he found the former tugging stoutly away at a huge ox chain.

The poor animal was barking and whining in the most piteous manner; but no signs of Turk remained except the severed rope from which the dog had gnawed himself free.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish," said Sam. "I'll bet the cuss has gone in search of his master. If so, he'll give Joe dead away; what's ter be did?"

While he was thinking, Sam heard a rustling in the bushes behind him, and the next instant Turk leaped to his feet, where he crouched and whined as if pleading to be followed, and on regarding him more closely Sam saw the wound upon the head, and also that his mouth was covered with fresh blood.

"Great heavens!" ejaculated Sam, "Joe's been murdered!"

Turk licked his hand and fawned upon him.

"All right, old boy," said Sam, patting his head, "I'll go. I know what you want."

Sam ran to the stable and saddled his pony, then freeing Snap, he mounted and dashed away after the two dogs, who darted off at a swift pace.

Presently Sam heard the dogs howling and whining piteously, and then he leaped from his pony and followed.

On penetrating some feet into the underbrush, Sam found Joe lying face uppermost on the muddy soil.

"I wonder how it occurred," said he; "they must have found him following and laid him out, the blasted murderous skunks. I warn-ed him to look out for 'em!"

He had scarcely uttered the words when he heard a sound behind him, and turning, he saw Nat Gleason and Saul Slingsby close beside him.

"So you've killed him!" shouted Sam, regarding the two smugglers with flashing eyes.

"What's that?" demanded Nat.

"You know what I mean," retorted Sam. "You know what he followed ye for and laid him out, but I'll block yer little game."

"What do you mean?"

"You know that ye stole his wife," replied Sam, hotly, "and killed him so that he couldn't find out where ye hid her."

"Do you know, young man," said Nat dryly, as his eyes lit with an evil light, "that you allow your tongue altogether too much latitude? This outrage was not of our seeking; we had nothing to do with it whatever, we were looking for Joe ourselves."

"I don't believe it!" retorted Sam. "I believe you only meant to finish your devilish work; at any rate, you're too many for me, so here goes to inform the proper authorities."

"Seize him!" shouted Gleason, with an oath; "it will never do to let him escape—he'll give it all away."

In an instant the two men sprang upon the prostrate boy and seized him stoutly by the arms.

Sam struggled desperately, and kicked and bit like a good fellow, but the men were too strong for him, and in less than two minutes he was securely gagged and bound on the back of his pony.

Then lifting up Green Mountain Joe, they placed him also on a horse, and, followed by the dogs, who made no attempt to stop them, they started for the log cabin.

CHAPTER XXI.

SAM WILLIS' ESCAPE.

STRANGE as it may seem, during the melee neither Turk nor Snap attempted to aid their master or Sam Willis, but when the smugglers placed the insensible form of Joe and the gagged boy upon the horses, they followed the abductors at a safe distance as they rode away.

When the smugglers reached the broken bridge they removed Sam and Joe from the horses and laid them upon the planks, while they procured a flat boat to ferry themselves across the swollen stream.

Setting it down stream, they fastened it to the girders, and placing Joe and Sam in the bow, they led their horses on board; but when they came to perform a like office for Sam's pony, Pug utterly refused to go on board.

"Curse the brute!" roared Nat, savagely; "if he reaches shore he'll gallop home and give us away."

Drawing his pistol he aimed it at the pony's head, sending a bullet through his brain.

The poor brute tossed up his head with a snort and a cry of agony, and sunk beneath the water, turning it red with his blood.

Meanwhile the hunters' dogs had appeared in sight at the sound of the shooting.

"Come here, doggie, doggie," said Saul; "come here!"

But the wary animals drew cautiously back. Crack!

Saul fired at them, but missed his aim, while they instantly disappeared in the underbrush.

"Curse the brutes!" hissed he; "wait until I get another sight at them."

"No," shouted Nat; "let the dogs go. We must get the prisoners to quarters before any one hears the firing and comes to see what it means."

In less than two minutes the boat was safe across the stream and moored in the secret nook, near the house in the clearing.

Then the prisoners were removed to the dwelling, where Joe was placed in charge of his wife, who, by careful nursing, restored him to consciousness, but all to no purpose; the light of reason had fled, and he was a raving maniac.

Meanwhile Sam Willis had been conveyed to the cellar and tossed down upon a bed of straw.

"This is decidedly a pretty kettle of fish," said he, half aloud. "I wonder how the blazes I'm going to get out of it."

Getting up he stretched his limbs a bit, and proceeded to examine the door, which he found was composed of oak, heavily studded with nails.

"No chance that way," said he; "now for the window."

The grating was composed of solid iron, but on examining further, he found a mallet and a chisel.

"This will do," said he, cheerfully, "but I must wait till night to attempt to escape."

Then hiding his find beneath the mattress, he lay down and finally fell into a sound sleep.

When he awoke it was completely dark, and by the striking of the clock above-stairs, he learned that it was ten o'clock.

"Time to commence," said he, and rolling up the straw mattress beneath the window, he commenced operations on the iron bars with the mallet and chisel.

He worked cautiously but swiftly, and by eleven but two bars remained; when suddenly he heard footsteps descending the stairs.

His heart almost ceased its beating; was he to be discovered after all?

Hal! a bright thought struck him; there was some bread left from the meal furnished in the morning by his abductors.

Hastily descending from his perch, he moistened it in water, and rubbing some of the earthen floor into it, he replaced the bars and refilled the cracks with the paste; then replacing the mattress, he lay down, pretending to be fast asleep.

He had scarcely time to do so before Saul Slingsby entered, bearing a lantern and a blanket.

"It's rather cold," said he, "and I thought I'd bring you down a blanket."

"Thank you," replied Sam, yawning as if he had just awakened; "I was beginning to feel a bit cold myself."

Saul flung the blanket over him, and went to the grating, which he examined carelessly.

"That's all right," said he. "I brought you this, too; it will keep out the cold."

He tossed Sam a small flask of spirits, and started toward the door.

"Couldn't you leave the lantern!" asked Sam. "It's infernally dark down here."

"Sure," replied the smuggler, "there you are. Good-night."

"Good-night!" replied Sam, and then Saul went out, locking the door behind him.

A few moments passed, and then taking a pull at the spirits, he resumed work. Twelve o'clock struck as the last bar fell.

Sam was nearly up to the opening when he again heard footsteps descending the stairs; but this time he was not so fortunate, for before he could get down, Saul reeled unsteadily into the cellar.

He was very drunk, but not so full as to prevent his seeing what had taken place.

"Hello, stop that!" shouted he, darting toward Sam.

But Sam was ready; with a good aim he hurled the mallet at his head.

The heavy wood struck the smuggler on the temple and felled him.

This done, Sam crawled through the opening to the open air.

"Thank Heaven!" he gasped as he looked up at the starry sky, "thank Heaven I am free! Hello, what's that?"

He felt something cold upon his hand, and looking down he found one of Green Mountain Joe's dogs licking it; the next instant the other appeared.

Looking around, Sam saw a window just above him from which a light appeared. It was the window where Joe had been standing when shot from behind.

Clambering up on the bench, Sam looked in through the window.

CHAPTER XXII.

HE saw a room with a table, chairs, the old Dutch clock, and a bed, with a woman sitting beside it.

Presently he saw her get up and lift a man's head from the pillow.

"Husband," he heard her say, "I am so glad you have revived. You are better now."

"No," moaned Joe; "my eyes burn, my head is hot, my brain's on fire."

"My God," moaned Sam, "Joe's as crazy as a loon, but, thank Heaven, he ain't dead!"

Presently Joe spoke again.

"Let me up," he gasped, "let me up. I must go to the mountain; the lead mine's in danger; it will be gone unless I go to guard it. Nat Gleason'll steal it from us, Sadie; he has marked it for his own. He'll take the mine and separate us as he has before!"

Mrs. Walmsley clasped both her arms around her husband's neck, and pressed him tenderly but forcibly back upon the pillow, where she soothed his face with her hands.

"Be calm, husband," said she, firmly, "you only injure yourself by the violence of your emotions; you must be quiet!"

"But I must go, I say," he shouted, "I must guard the mine while living, or I must guard it dead!"

His wife arose and went to the table, where she poured something into a glass, and held it to his lips.

He drank it readily, and for a moment it quieted him, but the next instant he was as violent as ever.

"Hist!" said he, sitting up, "look thar!"

He pointed directly at the window, through which Sam was gazing, with his white face pressed against the glass.

Sam drew back, and dropped hastily from his perch, and as he reached the ground, he could hear the maniac shriek:

"I see ye, Sam Willis! Sam Willis, come hyer, I say!"

It will now be necessary to pass over an interval of four months in the course of our story, during which period but a few events of importance occurred in Malbro.

It was a cold night in January, 1840.

The snow was falling heavily, and Sam Willis, with his father and mother, was seated near the fire in the Willis homestead.

"It's curious," said Sam, "what a change that storm occasioned up in the mountains; when I was up there last the trout-brook had been completely turned from its bed, and formed a new course; not a trace of the lead mine was to be seen, and Green Mountain Joe's cavern was filled with water. Poor Joe, I wonder what's become of him."

"The Lord knows," replied his mother; "but, bless me, what was that?"

The remark was occasioned by a low, scratching sound at the door.

The old watch-dog rose from the hearth, uttering a low howl as he sniffed uneasily around.

"There's something wrong outside," said old Willis, taking his rifle down from the crotch over the mantel; "who's there?"

In reply the door burst suddenly open, permitting a blinding drift of snow to enter the room, as two gaunt, half-famished fox-hounds

bounded in, closely followed by Green Mountain Joe.

He was covered with snow, and his long hair and unkempt beard barely served to hide his half-starved features, while his wild eyes roved unsteadily to and fro over the room.

"I've found you again, Sammy," said he, fixing his gaze upon his young companion, "and you must come with me. I must go up and guard the mine. Nat Gleason means to steal it from us."

"Why, bless you, Joe," responded Sam, there ain't a vestige of the mine left; it's clean swamped by the line storm, and you couldn't find it to-night if it wasn't."

"I tell you I can," shouted the trapper. "I tell you I must; it'll be too late in the mornin', Sammy, too late in the mornin'!"

But he sat down, notwithstanding, and ate a hearty meal. During supper he told how he had been changed like a wild beast by Gleason, who had estranged his wife's affections; he told how he had eluded their vigilance and escaped to go and watch the mine; and finally, by considerable persuasion, he was got to bed.

But when morning came Joe was gone again, and so was the farmer's rifle.

"I'll bet he's gone to shoot Gleason," said Sam.

"I don't blame him much if he does," replied his father; but we must try to find him all the same, for I don't believe he can get far in his present weak condition; so come along."

In a few moments after they quitted the house they struck the trail.

There had not been a heavy fall of snow the previous night, and thus the trail was easily followed.

Sam beat out on the side track so as to avoid breaking the trail, for by this time they were on the mountain and close to Malbro Pond, as it is termed, a sheet of water about a mile long and half as wide.

Just as they reached it, Green Mountain Joe's dogs came tearing toward them like mad, and then ran out on the ice, which was but partially covered with patches of snow, the rest having drifted off with the wind.

As they went on, the two hounds turned with piteous cries and ran toward the center, where they paused and bent down with their noses close to the ice.

"I wonder what's up?" said Sam, turning pale. "My heart misgives me."

Then he went on again, but had to proceed with great caution, for the ice was like glass.

But finally he reached the spot where the dogs rested.

As he did so they both uttered a wild, piercing howl.

Sam looked down and uttered a cry in turn for right in front of him lay his father's rifle and Green Mountain Joe's fur cap.

It was indeed too late!

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE ARMS OF DEATH.

"By all that's merciful, father!" gasped Sam, as the tears started into his eyes. "Poor Joe was right when he said that it would be too late in the mornin'."

"I'm afraid so, Sammy."

"Yes," continued the boy, "you can see whar the pesky varmints was strugglin' with the poor crazed man. It was Injins, sure enough, for ye can see the marks of the moccasins in the snow near the air-hole. Hullo! what's this?"

"What?"

"A whisky flask, covered with willow work," replied Sam. "Ha! ye cussed red skunk, I've got you dead to rights! This murder was committed by old We-me-luck; you know he had it in for us up in the mountains. Joe smashed his head at the Malbro Arms, and the old hound's had it in for him ever since. This flask belongs ter him; I've seen old Adams fill it time and again at the Malbro."

"Well, if that's the case, it 'pears ter me as if ye had got him down pretty fine."

"I should judge," said Sam; "but there ain't no use lookin' furdur arter poor Joe until the ice breaks up in the spring; nor in attemptin' ter look up We-me-luck either, for that matter, as more'n likely he's making a dead set for the Canada line at this very minute."

And having arrived at this conclusion, Sam and his father turned homeward, sick and sad at heart.

Months passed, and after decaying and rotting away at the margin, the ice on Malbro Pond melted and disappeared with the setting in of spring.

This break-up had been long anticipated, and quite a number of the Malbro villagers were present when the change took place.

"There she goes," said Job Wormley, as a heavy blast of wind took the flimsy ice and rippled its surface into undulating waves; "that's the last of that ice for this season."

Sure enough, the next instant a myriad of cracks split the shining mass, and, as it floated away in various directions, a ponderous dark object appeared amidst the debris, floating slowly toward the shore.

"That's Joe, poor fellow," said the constable, as many a sympathetic expression came from the crowd as they watched the swaying mass. But as it approached closer, the constable uttered a cry of surprise.

"What's the matter?" demanded Squire Chase, who stood close at hand.

"Matter enough, squire," replied the constable, as he seized up a boat-hook and ran to the bank, "we've got two instead of one; there's two bodies here."

A cry of surprise rent the air as the constable plunged the boat-hook into the clothing and drew the noisome objects on shore.

They were the bodies of Green Mountain Joe and We-me-luck, and had evidently perished together, for they were closely interlocked in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE remains of Green Mountain Joe and We-me-luck were buried in the Malbro churchyard on the day following the inquest, and within a week all conversation concerning the mysterious affair had ceased.

Meanwhile, as spring verged into summer, Sam Willis resumed his hunting expeditions in the mountains.

On these occasions he invariably took with him some provisions for the dead hunter's dogs, who since the loss of their master had remained constantly in the vicinity of the scene of his death, lingering around the pond and making night hideous with their cries and moans.

It was on one of these excursions, in the early part of June, that Sam had remained in the mountains later than usual.

It was about six in the evening, on his return home, that he found himself in Joe's camp, near the place of the discovery of the vein of lead. Sam seemed considerably surprised that he had wandered thither, for he had hitherto avoided the spot, as it recalled too many unpleasant recollections.

"This is the spot," thought he, "that poor Joe sot such store on, and what does it all amount ter now? Not a vestige of the find remains, and not a sign of poor Joe either."

Unconsciously Sam had muttered the last few thoughts aloud.

As he ceased speaking he heard a faint, low sigh behind him; and it seemed as if the leaves of the trees stirred and rustled above him as if some one was passing through them.

Just then a flight of owls swooped down, hooting and flapping their noxious wings, and as the boy listened it seemed as if they were shouting to him: "Sam Willis, I see ye; Sam Willis, come hyer, I say!"

In an instant Sam was on his feet, with his eyes fairly starting from his head, and the cold beads of perspiration pouring down his face in streams.

And then a much more startling event occurred.

Again he heard the mysterious rustling and swaying of the branches, followed by the ghostly sigh, and then as plainly as ever he had heard it in his life, he heard the voice of Green Mountain Joe:

"But I must go. I must guard the mine while living, or I must guard it dead!"

Poor Sam would have shrieked aloud had not his tongue refused its office.

But again he heard the voice of Joe:

"Sam Willis—Sam Willis, avenge my death. It was not We-me-luck that killed me!"

"It was not We-me-luck?" demanded the listener.

"No!"

"Who was it, then?"

"It was——"

But the sentence was never ended, for just then the owls flew out from the hemlock

thicket close at hand, hooting anew, and it seemed to the startled boy as if their croaking found words in:

"Sam Willis! Sam Willis! I see you! Sam Willis! Sam Willis! Come hyer, I say!"

"Great Powers!" gasped he, "those were the very words poor Joe uttered the night I see him sitting up in bed when I escaped from Gleason's."

Again the owls hooted as the trapper's voice faded with the rising breeze, and, to his intense surprise, he saw Snap and Turk, more famished and starved than ever, dart from the thicket as if in pursuit of their ghostly master.

Poor Sam could stand no more; his nerves were giving way; his senses seemed deserting him as, with a cry of terror, he darted down the mountain as if pursued by a legion of fiends.

CHAPTER XXV.

JOE'S DOGS ON TIME.

Two weeks passed, and it took Sam nearly that time to recover from the fright occasioned by the mysterious events in the panther camp.

It was a period of considerable excitement in Malbro.

A great religious revival was going on in a grove close to the Willis farm. People had gathered from far and near to listen to the exhortations of a noted revivalist, who was haranguing the congregation from the pulpit. He was a stout built, gray-haired man, with a long beard, and wore green goggles.

He had reached the climax of his discourse, and was describing the sufferings of the tortured sinner with such glowing effect that many men groaned and groveled on the ground, while women fairly shrieked aloud.

It was at this moment that a loud shout was heard from the rear seats, as two gaunt, famished fox-hounds, with blazing eyes and wide-distended, froth-flecked fangs, darted through the throng and sprang into the pulpit.

With a gasp and cry the exhorter darted back, placing his hands behind him; but before he could make another motion the savage animals leaped upon him, burying their sharp fangs in his throat and bosom.

"Great God!" shouted the constable, "they're Green Mountain Joe's dogs, and they're throttling the life out of the parson."

In a moment others were at his side, beating away at the dogs' heads with sticks and canes until they lay dying by the side of their victim.

But they were too late, for the dogs had done their fatal work. They had torn away the wig and beard from the speaker's head, revealing the features of Nat Gleason, the smuggler.

"So it's you, is it?" shouted the constable, stamping his feet. "Cursed if I ain't sorry I tried to save ye!"

"You needn't mind that, Job," said Gleason, gasping, as the warm life-blood poured in torrents from his lacerated throat. "You only came to the aid of a dying man, and it can't do you any harm."

"Don't want any more of your preaching," replied Job. "You're no good."

"I know it," answered Gleason, wearily, "but I swear as a dying man that I have repented for my crimes in tears of blood; but I could not find it in my heart to give up and surrender. But now that it's all over, I'll make a clean breast of it. It was I that killed Green Mountain Joe. We-me-luck and myself were making for a secret hiding-place in the mountains when we came face to face with Joe, whom I supposed safe at home under guard. We-me-luck engaged with him in deadly conflict, and they were close to an air-hole in the center of Malbro Pond. The devil prompted me, and I shoved them in. I deemed myself free from the only obstacle to my marriage with the trapper's wife, but Providence willed otherwise, for when I returned she was dead."

These were the last words of Nat Gleason, for the next moment he was dead.

Sam Willis and others still live, but, notwithstanding that himself and many others have prospected freely for that lead mine on the mountain side, no one has located it yet, although occasionally on stormy nights old hunters in the mountains hear the baying of dogs, and mutter to themselves:

"There go Turk and Snap, guarding that lead mine with GREEN MOUNTAIN JOE."

[THE END.]

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